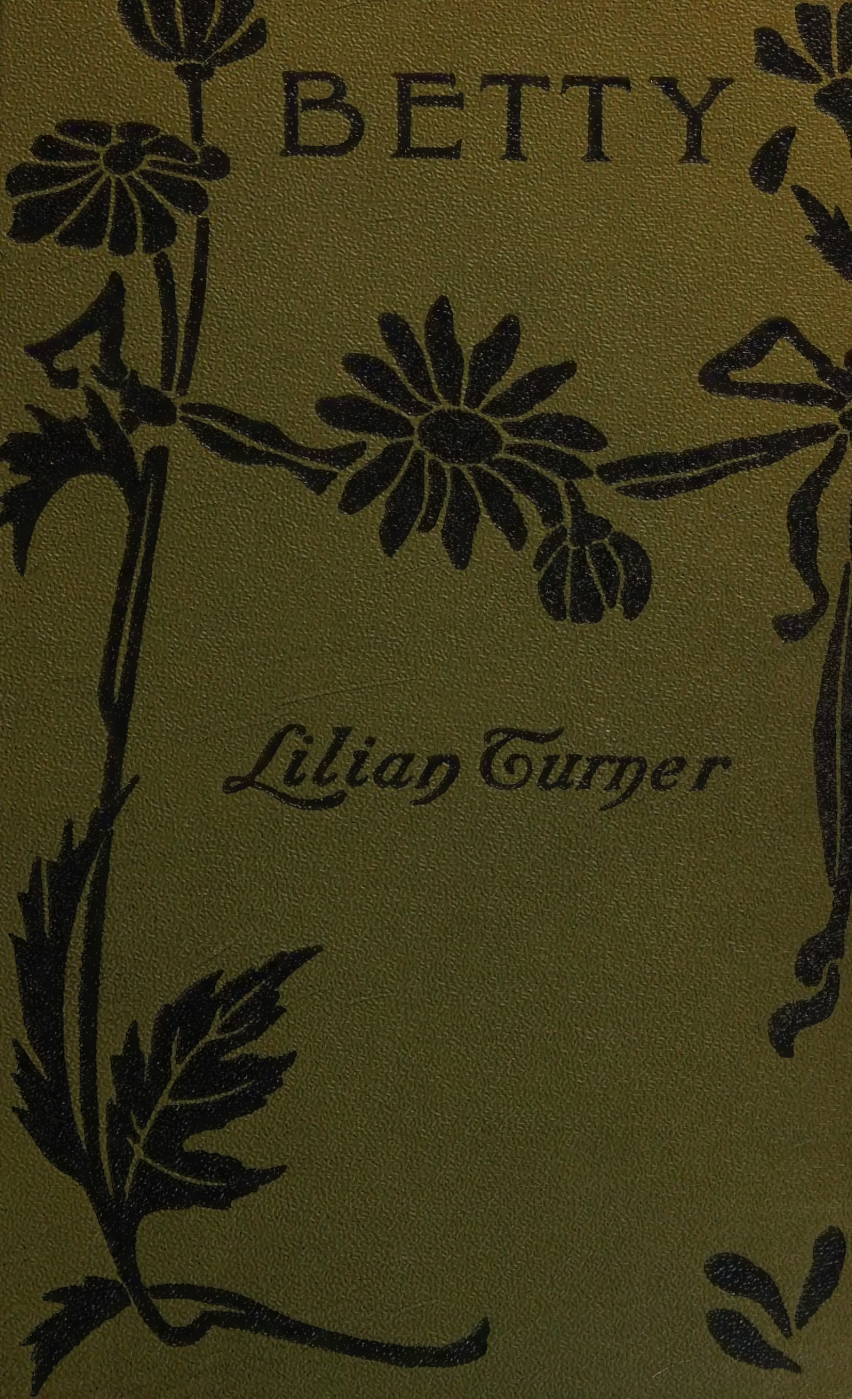




BETTY

Lilian Turner

Margie Virginia Voltmer

Betty the Scribe



"FOUR IS VERY OLD," CONTINUED BETTY, "AND YOU SHOULD
BE GENTLE WITH PEPPER."

BETTY, THE SCRIBE

BY
LILIAN TURNER

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CHAPTER I

AN UNIDEAL TO-DAY

"BETTY, Betty—where ever are you?"

"Oh, dear!" said Betty, and her eyes went distressedly over her paper-strewn table, "why *can't* I be left alone!"

Without replying, she bent over her writing again, and the worried lines went away from her forehead, the absorbed look returned to her face.

"Betty—oh, Betty, *do* come."

But Betty did not move. She just closed her ears to the cry, and went deeper and deeper into her work—the work she loved, the work that made her pulses tingle and her cheeks burn, that lifted her into all the glories and beauties of another world, away from the troubles and petty cares of this threadbare, everyday one.

And now there was that old, old cry beating all over the house—

"Betty—oh, Betty, *do* come."

"I won't go," said Betty angrily. "They can do without me. Surely, I can have an hour of my own life to do as I like with!"

The door-handle turned, and a small girl in a shabby cotton frock peeped into the room—a little girl with wonderful hazel eyes and a tumbled mass of golden hair.

"Oh, Betty!" she said, "oh, Betty—there you are! I've been calling everywhere for you. Dick——"

Betty waved her hand wildly.

"I know," she said, "Dick has smashed his nose—or yours, or Pepper's—I don't care. Why do you come to me every time these things happen?"

"But Dick's not broken his nose," said the little girl earnestly.

"Go away!" commanded Betty, and her eyes were fierce.

But the child stood still. Her rosebud mouth was twitching, her eyes were brimming, and her cheeks scarlet. She was trying very hard not to burst into a storm of tears.

"Dick wouldn't give Pepper his train," she said, "and Pepper scratched Dick's cheek, so then Dick hit Pepper *very* hard, and now

they're both crying and crying, and I *can't* stop them."

"Oh, dear!" said Betty, sighing. She gathered together the loose sheets of her writing and put the soap-dish on them. "I suppose I'll have to come. It's no matter what *I'm* doing, *I* must be at the beck and call of everyone. No one ever considers *me*."

The last sentence was only muttered. Indeed, most of her words were, but the waiting child caught much of her speech, and saw her frowning forehead and angry eyes.

"Where's Mary?" inquired Betty, still hovering around her beloved table.

"In the kitchen, Betty dear," said the child. "I don't believe Dick could help it, because Pepper was wanting everything he got—and it wasn't *quite* Pepper's fault, because Dick had really got one of the carriages of his train—and——"

"Oh, be quiet, do!" ordered Betty impatiently. "I'm tired of you all. One of these days I'll run away, and I'll never come back any more."

After which fearful threat she angrily pushed the child in front of her, and went out of the room, slamming the door behind her.

Down the narrow passage she went, into

the wider one, stepping briskly, her head up, her eyes indignant. A whole dictionary of hot words was running riot in her mind, but perhaps they were too chaotic to put into speech, for when they reached the dining-room door she only pressed her lips together and turned an angry face to the room.

Four-year-old Dick was pushing a big book and a smaller one steadily upon a line on the linoleum, the pattern being so marked as to allow an unlimited supply of "railway lines." Under the table, "Pepper," lying on his side, was disconsolately working a solitary and coverless book up and down, sobbing "sho—sho—sho" as he worked.

"They're not crying!" said Betty, turning angrily upon the little girl. "What do you mean by coming and disturbing me for nothing, Joan?"

"Oh!" said Joan, "they were screaming *ever so*—and I couldn't stop them."

"Sho—sho—sho!" sobbed Pepper.

Dick raised a serene face and a pair of tear-wet blue eyes.

"Pepper wanted my tender," he said, "and my line and engine."

Pepper continued his solitary game, sobbingly attempting a whistle.

"Come here, Pepper," ordered Betty.

But he took no notice. He knew very well what that big elder sister of his looked like when that tone was in her voice.

"Come here, Dick; and come here, Pepper, *at once*."

Dick looked at Betty, gathered up his books, and went towards her.

"Every time I go to get my passengers into my train, Pepper takes my tender," he said, and his wet eyes were eloquent—"and he takes my Katoomba station and my Sydney station, and my Strathfield station."

Two shades of blackness faded from Betty's face; one of her arms went round the little injured boy.

"Come here, Pepper," she said softly—"come, darling."

He came instantly then, hugging his book and sobbing in a heartbroken way. The next minute he was in Betty's arms and her cheek was wet with his tears. Joan climbed into the back of the chair, and her little arms went round her sister's neck, so that the four heads were all close together, and Betty seemed to be kissing the three little faces at once.

"It's dreadful when you go away, Betty," whispered Joan—"darling, *dear* Betty."

"Now was it fair of Pepper?" queried Dick, stroking her cheek.

"Want all the puffers," sobbed Pepper, clinging closer.

For a space Betty just gave out comfort.

"Poor little Joan," she said; "I won't write any more to-day; I'll be your very own Betty. No, my precious Dick, Pepper is a little cheat. He oughtn't to take your puffers and stations. There, Pepper darling, Betty will make you a beautiful train and three stations—yes, and a tender and four trucks."

Then when calmness came, and Dick and Pepper had kissed each other and examined each other's trains in quite a friendly spirit, Betty proceeded to inculcate wisdom, after her fashion.

"Dick, you musn't forget how very old you are," she said, "you are growing a big, big boy."

Dick held back his head and smiled benignly upon his little brother.

"Four is very old," continued Betty, "and you should be gentle with Pepper, and help him to make his trains, because he is only three. And I'm sure you could build him a

few nice stations; you're so good at stations."

Then she looked at Pepper, and her eyes grew still softer.

"And Pepper must never take Dick's things because that isn't fair; and if Pepper isn't fair, he'll have to give up playing trains altogether. Wouldn't that be dreadful? Now let us make some more stations."

In a little while the wrong was righted. Dick had two lengthy trains plying between three stations, and Pepper's two trains were just as lengthy. And so deftly did Betty arrange the quarrel that they ran their trains upon adjoining lines and used the same stations, making the game the keener.

"Dear Dick!" said Pepper, in a burst of enthusiasm, kissing his brother, as they paused at Strathfield to allow their passengers to alight.

"Poor little Pepper," said Dick, benevolently returning the kiss.

Betty turned away. Her manuscript was in her room, and she had promised to write no more to-day. Her eyes fell on her little sister's face.

"Joan will help me," she said. "We'll make everything nice for daddie. Fresh flowers in the vases and a pretty table."

A sudden feeling of virtue swept over her.

"Where are the vases?" asked Joan.

"Ah!" said Betty, and a little cloud came over the new brightness of her face—"we've forgotten all about flowers and prettiness for weeks, haven't we? Never mind, we'll make up for weeks and weeks of to-morrows."

"Oh, Betty!" said Joan rapturously,—"*may I get any flowers I like—whatever colors?*"

"Just what you like," said Betty. "Take a basket and the kitchen scissors, and I'll wash the vases."

Life to Betty was a very troublesome, disorderly affair—a perpetual striving to make the path of beauty and the path of duty identical.

A year ago, when she was little more than sixteen, she had been brought suddenly home from school to be elder daughter to her delicate mother.

There was Dorothea, pretty, graceful Dorothea, who was four years older than Betty, but no one for an instant considered sending for her.

To begin with, Dot had never been a home daughter at all. Until sixteen her education and accomplishments had been matters of the first importance with her parents.

Dorothea must be "finished" properly; there were years and years coming in which to consider the twins, Elizabeth and Cyril. So Dorothea was "finished." And, like many another daughter, when this mysterious process was completed—when she could play and sing and dance and paint and do fancy-work—she was a little too good for her home.

Her mother, who was always weak where Dot was concerned, shrank from immersing her in the routine of life in their weather-board home in the North Sydney bush. She quite leapt at an offer that came shortly after school-days had ended, for Dot to be companion to one of her schoolmates, a wealthy squatter's daughter.

And then Betty was given her chance.

But Cyril, her twin, was having his, too, so Betty's list of accomplishments was necessarily curtailed. Besides, two new members were added to the family in the time—Dick and Gordon (popularly known as "Pepper," on account of the quickness of his temper).

So Betty only had singing as an extra. Her school career was a somewhat checkered one, and at the end of it she had not a single good conduct prize to put beside Dot's eleven, although she certainly invariably carried off

the Essay, and the English prizes, and four times the French.

With one consent it was Betty who was wanted when the Dark Shadow fell on the small home.

There were four babies to be cared for when the mother ceased from caring and slipped into the shadowless night, where were neither troubles nor tears.

Five-year-old Joan, three-year-old Dick, and Pepper, who was two, and had to be helped over the latter part of his teething troubles—and that terrible personage, a New Baby!

But that was all six months ago now.

The baby had cast aside her long garments, and stepped into short, babyish dresses and pinafores, and Betty's young shoulders were growing accustomed to their pack.

Nancy, the next in age to the twins, was nearly eleven, and delicate. She was only as tall as an ordinary child of seven. Her face was white, despite the gum-tree laden air, and nearly always wore a peevish frown, and her mouth was thin and querulous.

Cyril was kept at school for six months longer than Betty. Not that he was cleverer or qualifying for anything in particular, but

simply because it was so difficult to know what to do with him.

Finally, his father had been able, upon the payment of a small premium, to article him to a clever young architect. But the family still felt the pinch of that premium.

CHAPTER II

THE PATH OF DUTY

THE next morning Betty arose brimming over with excellent resolutions. She had made them the previous night, and had, moreover, committed them to paper, and daylight found her determined and eager to put them into practice.

She desired to be a good daughter to her father. For the last year she had been, to a certain limited extent, his *confidante* and companion. But now she resolved to be more—to look closer after his comforts, to be his right hand, his helpmate.

Then she must, as ever, be special sister and helper to Cyril. That office had devolved upon her as a matter of course from their days of bib and pinafore. She must be a mother to the babies—Joan, Dick, Pepper, and Baby. She had been very negligent of them of late.

Nancy required “leading” and “training,” she said vaguely; and Mary—dirty, slipshod,

good-hearted maid-of-all-work—required a domesticated mistress continually at her side.

The home called out for its keeper and guide, the garden for its lover and worker.

Betty was wide-visioned and earnest-purposed, but she was only seventeen, and her heart was the heart of the poet and dreamer.

She made her list when the household slumbered—near midnight, by the flickering light of a candle. Behind her was her own bed and little Pepper sleeping therein. The six-months-old baby was in a dress basket, raised on two chairs between the bed and the wall, and upon the other side of the bed, near Pepper, was Dick in his cot.

As Betty wrote and ruled her list, her eyes went again and again to the three baby heads, all of them given into her keeping—her own. And in her heart, young as it was, blithe, dream-loving, there was yet the mysterious spirit of true womanhood.

So she made her list. It dealt with each hour of the day, from six in the morning until the hour before midnight.

At the top of it she wrote—

"MY DAY'S WORK."

and then came underneath it lines and cross-lines, making pigeon holes for the hours.

6 a.m. to 7.30 a.m. . . Rise. Bathe. Dress. Prayers.
Bathe Joan, Dick, Pepper. Superintend Nancy.

7.30 a.m. to 8 a.m. . . Feed Baby. Cook breakfast and overlook table. Pack Cyril's lunch.

8 a.m. to 9.30 a.m. . . Make beds. Bathe Baby. Garden.

9.30 a.m. to 11 a.m. . . Cook. Settle children to play. Feed Baby.

11 a.m. to 1 p.m. . . Bolt and bar my door, and write.

1 p.m. to 2 p.m. . . Dinner.

2 p.m. to 3 p.m. . . Write.

3 p.m. to 4 p.m. . . Sew.

4 p.m. to 5 p.m. . . Children's hour.

5 p.m. to 6 p.m. . . Cook dinner, etc.

6 p.m. to 9 p.m. . . Dinner. Father. Children to bed.
Cyril. Sewing.

9 p.m. to 11 p.m. . . Silence and writing.

The morning following the making of the list saw Betty, shining-eyed and purposeful, fresh from her morning bath, blue-aproned and sweet, bathing Joan at seven by the clock. At half-past seven three clean, happy-faced little children were playing in the summer garden, and Baby was examining in wonder-

ment her complement of fingers and toes, as she swung in the old hammock under the apple tree. And Betty, blue-aproned still, was bending over the kitchen fire, grilling chops and issuing orders to Mary, surprised at the beginning of the New Order of Things.

Eight o'clock saw the family of Bruces sitting down in comfort to the first meal of the day—a marvelous achievement! There was even a breakfast bell to summon people to their chairs.

At nine o'clock baby was bathed and fed, and put to kick on the grass, and Betty, the two little boys, and Joan were working in the garden, while Cyril and his father had set off for the city, well-fed and breathing easily.

"We'll have a garden each," said Betty blithely, "and we'll work in it every morning."

"Oh! isn't it beautiful?" said little Joan rapturously, pausing with a pansy in her hand to look at her bright-faced, elder sister.

"Your pansy? Let me see," said Betty.

"Oh, no, no—not the pansy. I mean having you! Oh, Betty, darling, it is so lovely."

"Can I have my garden *close* to yours, Betty?" asked Dick, "cause I'll be wanting to say something to you all the time."

Little Pepper went close and rubbed his face on Betty's apron.

"Let me be 'lorest, Betty," he said; "let mine garden be on the top of yours."

Betty laughed, but their delight in her touched her.

Poor little motherless babies, how she had pushed them aside!

She gave Dick one corner of the long bed she had energetically commenced upon, Pepper another, and Joan a little piece beside Dick.

And how importantly busy they were! How great were their intentions; how microscopic the number of weeds they in reality uprooted!

"Look at this tree in my garden," said big Dick, "I'm going to get it out by the root."

He pointed to a luxurious dandelion plant. In a second Pepper's jealousy was in arms.

"Mine lee's as big as yours, Dick," he said. He pointed to a miniature dandelion plant.

"Just listen to him!" said Dick, smiling and beginning to chip ground in true workman-like style—"he really thinks his little tree's as big as mine."

"They're both so big," said Betty, laughing, "that I'm afraid to work between them, I

might get crushed. Oh, this poor, overcrowded, beautiful wallflower!"

"I would like two gardens," said Joan wistfully, "one for only pansies and violets and daisies, and one for all sorts of flowers."

Down the path came Nancy, holding a handkerchief to her cheek.

"Nancy, I thought you were at school by now. What is the matter?" asked Betty.

"Oh," said Nancy, sobbing, "I've got such a miserable toothache."

"Go and ask Mary for a clove, and run off. You will be late."

"And my head's beginning to ache, and I believe I'm getting a sore throat."

"Oh, I see," said Betty, laughing—"school fever. Well, it won't answer this time, my little lady, so off you trot!"

Nancy's thin lips curved angrily.

"No, it *isn't* school fever, so there!" she said. "I'm longing to go to school, only I don't feel I could go that long walk."

"Rubbish," said Betty. "Come, hurry off. You ate a good breakfast, and look very well. You needn't worry your little heart because you think we'll be laughing in the garden all day—I'm going in in five minutes."

Nancy went away sobbing bitterly.

"I don't love Betty a bit. Oh, she is an ugly girl! Oh, she's always horrid to me. Oh, I wish my beautiful, lovely Dot was at home—and Betty away!" and she took her bruised little heart to school.

Upon the dining-room wall at home was a picture of Dorothea—Dorothea at seventeen. Her golden hair was as a crown upon her shapely head, her eyes were mild and winsome and smiling, her young mouth was tender. Such a lovely face, always smiling, always serene, always seeming to say, "I love you."

Poor, wayward, fretful Nancy almost worshipped at Dot's picture. That such a perfect and perfectly dressed being could be her very own sister was difficult to be believed. But in her treasure box were little notes—always upon pretty notepaper, always beautifully written. Some of them began—"My little one Nance"; some, "Little sweet Nancy"; some ended, "Your own Dot," some, "Your very special sister Dot."

So that Dot really lived and really was her own sister her misunderstood little heart insisted, when calm reason spoke in favor of Dot being a fairy or a nymph.

At half-past nine Mary put her head out of

the kitchen window.

"You said as I was to tell you when it was half-past nine, Miss Betty," she said, looking as amused as if Betty had been trying to swim on the garden path.

"Look out!" cried Dick excitedly, "mine's an iron bark and it's falling your way. I can't stop it—it'll crush you."

The tears rushed into Joan's eyes.

"Oh, not yet, Betty; I'll be good for ever and ever if you'll stay a little longer," she said.

But Betty was mindful of her list.

"I can't," she said—"not a minute." She stooped and whispered, "You shall come with me and help me make the pudding. And—oh—the beds!"

"I can't stop yet," said Dick, raising a heated face. "I'd like to play, but I must get this tree down first—it's dangerous."

"So's mine langerous, too," said Pepper, working vigorously; "I can't lay till I've got it done."

Betty and Joan went inside together—the little girl and the big—supremely happy.

And to Betty's credit be it spoken, eleven o'clock did see the beds made, the pudding made and in the pantry, the baby fed and put

to sleep, Joan supplied with paper and pencil to write a letter, and the little boys with their trains and lines and stations, amicably settled on the veranda.

Betty, mistress of herself and circumstances, sat serenely behind her closed door, and lifted the soap-dish from her manuscript.

She had done her duty, and now her lines had fallen into pleasant places. But——

The remembrance of her duty performed hung over her. She read her list through, and found not one thing undone. She thought quite proudly of the success of her baked custard, and the stewed fruit. Again, she saw her father's pleased smile as he looked round the orderly breakfast-table. She thought of the difference her half-hour's work had made in the garden, and a sense of smoothness possessed her.

But here, under her eye, were the people of her other world—the gay, brave-hearted soldier, her hero; the beautiful hospital nurse; the sham patient, her villain. Here was her new world, waiting for her to say whether the sun was to shine or darkness prevail, whether life was to be the issue of the threatening conflict—or death.

There was her pen, there the ink, and the door behind her was closed, while soft silence reigned.

Yet at the end of an hour all that she had written stood scored out, condemned under one long X as worthless. And Betty's elbows were on the table, and her head rested on her hands, while her eyes stared despairingly at the wall.

"I can't get hold of them," she said. "I've lost them all—why can't I write? I believe they never lived. Why can't I write? What is the matter with me?"

Afar off the dinner bell sounded. Betty had showed Joan where the clock hands must stand before she rang it.

"Dinner!" said Betty, and she rose with alacrity. "How the children will enjoy the pudding! Let me see. I write from two to three o'clock, and then I belong to the family till nine to-night. Betty Bruce, you are expected to do your duty."

CHAPTER III

THE PATH OF BEAUTY

So ran life for three days. Three whole days of beauty and goodliness to the children and household generally. Betty lived, loved, and worked in her home world, and gave only a slow hand and cold heart to that wonderful world of romance wherein it had been her delight to live.

But the morning and the evening of the fourth day came also.

It was after seven o'clock, and Friday, and Betty was still dutiful and wore her blue apron! Outside on the path the three bathed and brushed children played. The baby was in the hammock, the kitchen fire and Mary awaited Betty.

When all at once, through the cottage, came Mr. Bruce's voice excitedly—

"Betty, Betty, come here!" and Betty, in wonderment, went. He stood in the doorway of the bathroom, with a sheet of manuscript in his hand.

"Who did this?" he asked. "Whose is this?"

"What? Where? Show me," said Betty, and stood a tiptoe to see.

"It's your *writing*," said her father.

"It—it must have blown out of my room—one of the children must have brought it," said Betty.

"But who did it? Whose is it?"

"Mine," said Betty, and turned a flushing face aside.

Her father smiled. "Um!" he said.

He read on a few lines. Then he sat down on the edge of the bath and read a little more—and smiled again.

"Where's the rest?" he asked. Then he looked up and saw the distress signals in her face.

"It's first-rate," he said frankly. "I'm not humbugging you, child. But you've surprised me."

"Why?" asked Betty, leaning back on a damp towel to survey him in astonishment.

"I'm not surprised at your writing. I'd be surprised if you didn't, seeing you're seventeen, and a girl. Dot did, I remember. They all do. I'm surprised at what you've written. Let me see a bit more of it to-night."

Betty looked at her father incredulously.

"Really?" she said.

"Really," he said, and folded up the page and handed it to her. "Now, who the dickens has been putting earth and pebbles into the bath? It's very rough on one's skin, this sort of thing," and he began to clean it out. "I haven't time," he said, stopping short, "I'll have to do with a shower."

Betty went kitchenwards in a dream. There the gridiron and the fire awaited her; she looked at both dazedly.

Her father had been pleased, *pleased* and surprised, at her work. And he was not like ordinary fathers—not even like ordinary, well-read fathers. He had been an editor for months now. He wrote innumerable stories, skits, and sketches. He was the author of a book. What wonder his opinion counted with her as one of the first in the world?

"Ain't the fire good enough for you?" asked Mary at last.

"Um," said Betty slowly—"it's first-rate. I'm not humbugging you, child."

The lines that served the kitchen maid for eyebrows climbed far up on her forehead.

"Eh?" she gasped.

"Oh," said Betty. "What did you say?"

Chops, steak? Oh, yes, steak. Give it to me. Where's the gridiron? What do you want, Nancy, bothering me when you know I'm so busy? Go out of the kitchen at once."

Breakfast was ready at last, but was something of a scramble this fourth morning. And no bell had been rung. That in itself was the merest detail, but taken with other things, to wit, Cyril's forgotten lunch and the burning of baby's milk, it had its meaning to those who, running, read.

Betty's eyes wandered often to her father's face throughout that meal. He seemed to have forgotten all about her once more, or only remembered that she poured out coffee.

His thin, intellectual face, pallid as ever, was bent over some papers beside him, and now and again his fingers wandered through his black hair, still damp from his shower-bath, and made it look odd—a pity, Betty thought dreamily, so early in the day.

Once or twice his dark eyes looked through her, but, of course, he did not see her; no one at the table would have accused him of seeing. And then he got up, rolled his manuscript together, asked Nancy where his hat was, and Joan if she had seen his bag. And when these were put into his hand by each little daughter,

he was for stepping to the veranda briskly, when Joan said—

“You’ve only got your slippers on, daddie. I’ll get your boots.”

He was vexed with himself, and looked so; but he patted Joan’s rosy cheeks, put on his boots, and went away without remembering to look at anyone else, even authoress Betty.

And on the fourth morning, Betty gave up her half-hour in the garden. Joan wept with disappointment, and the little boys coaxed and pleaded, but Betty had deaf ears, and bribed them with loaf sugar to “be good.”

By economising that half-hour, and hurrying over the cooking, she was able to settle to her writing by ten o’clock instead of eleven. She was very anxious to read over the pages to be submitted to her father in the evening.

At one o’clock sharp Joan rang the bell, and she repeated the process every five minutes until half-past, when one little girl and two little boys rattled and banged at Betty’s door, and implored her to “come out.”

And she came, with scarlet cheeks and luminous eyes, for she had dipped into her world of romance again, and lost herself in its glories.

“You’re the noisest, most dreadful children

on earth," she burst out when she saw the eager trio in the hall. "What do you want now?"

"We want you to come, Betty dear," said Joan.

"Well, I can't. Run away and play at once. Didn't I start you at your play? Didn't I give you everything you wanted? Go away! You're getting abominably spoilt, that's what it is."

Pepper began to cry.

"Want my pudding," he said.

"Well, you can't have your pudding yet. Go and play trains with Dick."

Joan's eyes widened in distress, and Dick's mouth corners fell.

"Can't we have our dinner first?" they asked.

"It's not dinner-time," said Betty.

"Yes, 'tis, Betty."

Betty darted into her room to consult her little clock, stared at it, shook it, listened to it, and then turned to Joan.

"It's nearly a quarter to two," she said. "Why didn't you ring the bell, as I showed you?"

"I did. I've been ringing and ringing hundreds of times, haven't I, Dick?"

"Yes, hundreds," said Dick eagerly.

"Oh," said Betty, and her face grew crestfallen. Then it flushed, and her eyes looked horrified.

"Baby!" she said, and darted past the children, and down the passage.

Mary was pacing up and down the dining-room, hushing the wailing baby.

"I'm sure I don't know whatever's the matter with her," she said. "She's been yellin' and yellin' all the morning, enough to send anyone mad."

"Oh dear, oh dear!" said Betty. "I forgot her nine o'clock bottle, and her next one is an hour or more late. Oh, the selfish thing I am—she's starving!"

Everyone was impressed and horrified, and baby wept louder than ever.

"Keep her a minute," said Betty, and ran off to the pantry for the bottle. Fresh disaster awaited her—the fire was out, and she had to gather chips to kindle enough flame to warm the cup of milk and water that stood for the Bread of Life to the six-months-old infant.

Betty was crying herself as she fed the baby. Never before had she forgotten her in so culpable a manner.

"If it would do any good," she confessed to the wet-eyed baby, "I'd burn everything I've ever written, darling! I do hate myself."

It was half-past two before baby's hunger was appeased, for long drawn sobs continually interrupted the meal. Then the little eyelids fell to, the breath came more evenly, the lips grew more peaceful, and baby slept.

Then Betty, having settled her in the hammock, returned to the house, and there was Joan fractious (rare event) and Dick and Pepper were crying.

The poor authoress was woebegone exceedingly. It was one hour and a half past the children's dinner-time; the kitchen fire was once more a thing of dead embers. The grilled chops were merely burnt pieces of meat and bone; the potatoes, baked in their jackets, were hard and cold.

Betty rang for the pudding, too ashamed to utter a word of reproach to Mary, or a word of consolation to the children.

And Mary carried in a burnt sago pudding, with a black, black skin on the top of it. That pudding was Betty's last straw. Seeing it, she burst into tears, and was joined loudly by the children.

"It was all right at one o'clock," said Mary,

in self-defense, "but you wouldn't come; and then baby cried, and I had to pick her up and I clean forgot the pudding."

"It's my fault," said Betty tragically, "everything's always my fault. Bring in bread and butter and jam, and milk to drink." Then seeing Mary's hesitation—"Don't tell me the milk's spilled, and the bread's new and we've no butter."

The girl grinned. "We're out of butter," she said, "but the milk's all right, and the bread ain't new."

So Betty went back to her blue apron in the afternoon and tried to become a housewife again. She strove to make up to the four babies for her neglect by extra and exceeding gentleness and care for the rest of the day.

But her heart was heavy and her spirits sore. The impossibility of belonging even for separate hours to the two worlds—the world of romance and the world of reality—struck her tragically.

Surely hardly less possible was it to reconcile the roles of servitor to God and Mammon.

CHAPTER IV

NANCY'S REVENGE

IT was evening, and a soft silence lay over the house.

Outside, the moonlight bathed the bush world and the iron-roofed, weather-board cottage in its magical whiteness, and made them exceedingly beautiful.

Outside, Betty wandered in the garden, up and down the uneven, weed-grown path, and the spirit of a great sadness was upon her; for she was trying to reconcile two roads that lay before her in life—the road that she would tread, with the one that she should. And all that she could see was that two Bettys were wanted—one for the home and one for herself.

In the house Mr. Bruce sat among his books, sad as he almost always was now, since the Great Shadow had fallen on his home, yet busy and preoccupied. Betty, who had passed his door half an hour ago, told herself that he had quite forgotten all about her

manuscript, and she was inclined to take it as a sign that she, too, had better bury it in oblivion. And yet, oh! that burning "yet" surcharged with everything that made life life.

In their respective beds the babies slept the sweet, long sleep that belonged by right to them, as the night to the day.

Betty stole indoors and peeped at them, and kissed each little face tenderly.

In the dining-room Cyril was at one end of the table, Nancy at the other, both writing, both indifferent to the presence of the other.

"You must go to bed very soon, Nancy," said Betty authoritatively, "you'll be full of aches and pains in the morning and begging for a holiday."

Nancy spread her hands over her writing.

"I can't go till I've done," she said.

"Sums?" asked Betty.

"Yes," said Nancy, but her sharp little face flushed. Betty was passing by when something in the child's attitude arrested her. It was such a poor little undersized figure, cramped up there on the chair, one foot doubled under her as she sat, one dangling down; her body bent over her writing, her

little shoulders humped up as if she were laboring hard.

"I'll help you a bit," said Betty.

Alas, it was but seldom she said such words to Nancy!—Nancy, who was eleven and could dress and bathe herself, pack her own lunch, and even cobble up the holes in her own stockings and sew on buttons and tapes. Poor, little, cross Nancy, to whom no one ever seemed to dream of saying, "I'll help you a bit."

"I don't want you to," said Nancy sullenly; and she put both hands right over her paper.

Still Betty was gentle.

"Is it multiplication is vexation, or cruel division?" she asked, and put her hands on the little brown ones.

But to her amazement the next moment the child had struggled off her chair, clasping her paper, and stood there before Betty in a very tornado of temper.

"Can't you let me alone, ever? Why do you want to see if I'm telling stories? Nobody ever lets me alone! Oh, I do hate you, you ugly girl, Betty Bruce."

If it had been little Joan, or Dick, or Pepper, Betty would have gathered them in her arms and scolded and kissed the black temper

away. If it had been Cyril, she would have been submissive, seeking the fault in herself. But it was only Nancy.

"You are a very bad girl," she said angrily, "a naughty, untruthful girl, for I don't believe you were doing your lessons at all. Show me at once."

But the next minute Nancy was flying down the passage to her bedroom, sobbing hysterically and still clutching her paper.

Cyril looked up, annoyed at the interruption. A heavy frown was on his face, his eyes were angry.

"What on earth do you come bothering in here for?" he said. "We were quiet enough till you came."

In front of him was a book on bricklaying, but his eyes had not been on the open page even before Betty came in as a peace-dispelling interruption.

He had done a great deal of growing during the last four years. He was much taller than Betty, his twin, much better-looking than Dot, the beauty of the family. His eyes were blue and unusually gloomy, his hair was golden and curly, his complexion very fair.

He had no impulsive movements like Betty; he was never "wild," not often in

trouble. Yet his face wore a look of discontent, amounting almost to unhappiness.

"You look nearly as bad as Nancy sounds," said Betty; and Nancy's wild sobs still reached them from the bedroom precincts.

"I dare say you'd look a bit off if you had the life I have," said Cyril.

"Why? What's wrong? Are you in a bother with Mr. Shaw again?"

"Not more than usual," said Cyril dully. "But it's such a blessed office to be in. Of course, things get lost in our office like they do anywhere else, and *I* get all the blame. There ought to be another fellow there as well as me. Other offices have several clerks."

"I suppose," said Betty consideringly, "that you are really responsible, you know. What's lost now?"

"Oh, a fellow had to call for a plan to-day at twelve, and when he came I couldn't find it, and now the tender won't be in time. It's not my fault; there ought to be more fellows in the office."

"But," said Betty, thinking to drop a sisterly word in season, "haven't you a better chance to prove——"

"Oh, dry up," said Cyril heavily, bending over his book again. "I wish you'd go

away and let me alone. How can I work with you interrupting me? Listen to that kid—you ought to go and give her a good thrashing."

Betty left the room and half turned towards Nancy's room.

"She will wake the children," she said, "tiresome little monkey."

Then from the study came her father's voice.

"Betty, Betty! Some one find Betty and send her to me."

So Betty turned the other way.

"Here I am, daddie," she said, and her mind leapt to her manuscript.

"Well, bring along that story of yours. I've been expecting you."

"Very well," said Betty quietly, and her heart beat rapidly. The sign was not given for it to be buried in oblivion after all, as she had supposed half an hour ago.

She hurried to her bedroom and turned up the lamp. She tossed paper after paper aside, and in a few minutes she had found the one she sought and left the room.

Passing Nancy's door she paused a moment.

"Stop that noise instantly," she said. "Whatever you're crying for *I* don't know,

but your tantrums grow worse and worse."

Nancy raised a tear-blistered face from the floor, having flung herself there as usual.

"I should think I can cry if I like," she said. "You can punish me if you like; *I'm* going to punish you."

But Betty had gone. No one was there to listen to her plaint. She sobbed a little longer and sniffed, and then left the floor and sought the passage.

Betty had omitted to turn down her lamp, so that the thought came to the little girl that her elder sister was still there, beginning to write, perhaps; and she slipped down the passage with the lofty intention of standing in the doorway and poking out her tongue.

But Betty was not in the room at all. Nancy wandered in and considered waking the baby to worry her, but instead turned her attention to the small, ink-stained deal table at which Betty wrote. And she wandered round and round it, turning over the papers inquisitively, for she had not many points of honor, and among those she had reading other folk's papers was not included.

There was one sheet of paper entitled "The Tragedy of the Kangaroo," which Nancy glanced at, but soon tossed aside, saying

scornfully, "What a silly girl Betty is! Pooh! I wouldn't be so silly. I wonder where she keeps her diary; I suppose it's full about me. What's this—'My Day's Work.' Pooh! she doesn't do anything but write." The little girl stooped closer to the paper; the light was bad and hurt her eyes after so much crying.

"'6 a.m. to 7.30 a.m., rise, bathe, dress, prayers. Bathe Joan, Dick, Pepper. Superintend Nancy,'" she read.

"Superintend me!" she said aloud bitterly. "What's she do to me? What's supertend I'd like to know? She never touches me." Then her shrill voice rose in mimicry:

"'Nancy, are your ears clean? Come and let me see. Show me your nails—you nasty, dirty girl, go and clean them. And to-night sew some buttons on your pinafore.' That's all she does for me!"

She went on reading, and she read carefully. She even went over it twice, and from 7.30 a.m. till 11 p.m., in every partition she searched there was no further mention of her name. Nothing else about her! Her eyes grew black with anger.

Poor, little, motherless, bitter-hearted Nancy! It must be recorded that that one,

"Superintend Nancy, between 6 a.m. and 7.30 a.m." was all Betty had remembered of her sister.

Betty was at the study door, her roll of manuscript in her hand, and she was diffident and shy and happy.

Her father was sitting at the lamp-lit table, books and papers around him in confusion.

Just when Betty came he was at work on a set of proofs, but he smiled at her.

"Some day, Miss Bruce," he said, "you may consider it a matter of importance to keep an appointment made with an editor."

"I've been quaking in my shoes outside his door since tea-time," she answered, smiling.

"Did you bring your story? It struck me this morning as being the very thing for—ah, here we are; pass it over. Um, this is the beginning of it—um, I see."

He dipped into it, and Betty sat opposite to him and trifled with the cover of a book that was waiting reviewing.

Her father smiled; then he grew grave. He said, "Um—bad," and turned a page. Then he nodded, then smiled.

And Betty's eyes waited on him anxiously—oh, most anxiously—and the color deepened in

her cheeks and her hands trembled on the cover of the book.

Oh, the slippery, topsy-turvy, intoxicating world she had stepped into.

Her father laughed right out and said:

"Good; very good," and put back the manuscript and sat back smiling in his chair.

Then his eyes fell on Betty.

"I'd forgotten it was yours, child," he announced. "I'd entirely forgotten it was yours."

"Oh!" said Betty nervously.

"It's very good. Where did you get hold of it? You've been reading a bit of Gilbert and a lot of Thackeray. Still, it's original—bright and original."

"It's a long time since I read anyone," said Betty, smiling drearily.

"Probably. Still, you've read them, and they've done you good. When—how long have you been writing?" he asked, and his face showed keen interest.

"A hundred years, I think," said Betty.

"You have surprised me utterly—more than I can tell you. I could give you the names of half-a-dozen papers that would take that from you. I'd like it myself, only you can do better—what is that?"

A wailing cry broke through the house, and Betty started to her feet in dismay.

"Baby," she said. "It's—it's always so!" She moved to the doorway—"Yes, you were saying?" she continued.

"How could I remember with that going on?" he said. Something of anguish got into the cry, and Betty ran into the hall.

"I'll be back soon," she said.

"Not to-night," said her father. "*Tempus fugit*—shut the door. Now where did I put that essay on 'Cats and Tobacco'? Ah——"

Betty ran down the hall to her bedroom, almost crying herself.

"Other nights," she said, "she would have slept till eleven. But, of course, to-night!"

CHAPTER V

THE FOUNDLING

BETTY tried various devices with the unhappy baby impatiently. She leaned her against her shoulder and paced up and down the room. She carried her in her arms, she rocked her, she sang to her; but commiseration for herself made her indignant.

"Never a bit of peace for me," she said. "I would gladly have gone without every meal for three days to have heard what he was going to say. And now he'll have forgotten—he never remembers the next day. He said ——"

An apparition appeared in the doorway—Nancy half undressed, her black hair falling straightly around her white face, her dark eyes gleaming.

"I woke her for you," she said. "I shook her till she cried. Why should you sit still and enjoy yourself every evening when you won't give me a minute's peace?"

"What?" demanded Betty wrathfully.

"I'm going to do that every time you're comfortable, for a week, to pay you out for supering me. Think I want to be supered by you, Betty Bruce?"

Very quietly Betty put the baby back in the basket; very quietly she advanced to the little figure in the doorway.

"Did you wake her on purpose?" she asked quietly still, but her eyes were blazing, and her face was flushed.

"Yes," said Nancy, and in her heart were the beginnings of fear, but her eyes flashed back into her sister's. Betty's hands fell on her shoulders roughly.

"You wicked child," she said, and she shook her, not harshly at first, but appetite came with the administration of the first shake. So she shook her, and shook her and smacked her bare thin arms, first one and then the other.

"You perfectly horrid child," she said, "you're like nobody else—I don't believe you belong to us at all. You're just a black-haired foundling. Ah, you would, would you?" as the small, black-haired one set her sharp teeth into her wrist; "well, we'll see." She picked her up in her arms, carried her to her bed-

room, deposited her on the floor, and locked the door and went away.

To all appearance Betty had not lost her temper. She had kept outwardly calm, and she told herself she had punished the child justly.

She went back again and soothed the baby into slumber-land, and she covered Dick over with his blanket. But there was tempest in her heart—a tempest that made her knees and hands unsteady and kept her eyes blazing. She could not remember a single thing she had done to make Nancy seek so mean a revenge.

In her room Nancy sat motionless on the floor where Betty had put her. For a long time she neither cried nor spoke, only sat staring at the shut and locked door.

At last she shook back her black locks.

"I'll remember that for ever and ever," she said, "that's why she hates me so, and never looks at me, and only puts on her list—'Super Nancy.' Says I'm a foundling! and that's why daddie never speaks to me and why Cyril's always cross. Everybody hates me!"

Still no tears came. The bitter little heart grew stonier.

"I don't care—not if none of them don't

belong to me," she said; "I don't want them. I suppose somewhere there's people I belong to; I'll go and find them. I'll go away from these people who hate me and grudge me my food."

"I know how it was," she went on; "my mother left me on their doorstep with a ticket on me, and they found me one morning when it was snowing, and brought me in, and they've kept me ever since."

She got up and went over to the wash-stand and felt under it, and without hesitation, as one who knows the exact spot where she had hidden it, withdrew from there a school exercise book. Inside its covers was a sharpened lead pencil.

On the first page was written—"The Diary of Annette Bruce," and the little girl savagely crossed out the word "Bruce" and wrote "Nobody" in its place.

It looked to her very pathetic, and she said "Annette Nobody" again and again; but her eyes were still tearless. She turned over the pages till she came to one that said, "To-day, November 19th." and then she read over what she had written—

"Got up; had a row with Joan 'cause she'd taken my new hair ribbon for her doll's sash.

Had a row with Dick 'cause I cleared out some dirty paper from the bath, and he said it was his boats. Betty called me a dirty pig, as usehal, just because I hadn't done my nales. Packed my lunch. I could only get a bit of horrid crust, 'cause the baker hadn't been. Betty packed Cyril's, and gave him egg sandwich and wrasberry jam and a banana. Betty is a very ugly girl, and has inky fingers. Cyril is not a bit a gentleman. He took the ink from me to rite, and when I wanted it, he said, 'Get some more, you little newsence.' "

Her eyes brightened, and she went on, now kneeling by the bed.

"To-nite I had anuther row with Betty," when she stopped. Down the passage came footsteps and they stopped at her door; the key turned and the door opened.

Nancy looked up—there was Betty in the doorway, and there was something like a smile on her face.

"Poor little girl!" she said.

Nancy raised a glowering face.

"Come and kiss me," said Betty. "I've been thinking, dear, we'll have a new start."

"No, I won't," said Nancy.

"And we'll pretend there were no ugly yesterday. You shall be my chum sister."

"I won't belong to you at all," said Annette Nobody. A little of Betty's patience flew away, but she still advanced to the bed.

"What are you doing, dear?" she asked.

But Nancy shook her black veil of hair over her book.

"I hate you and Cyril and Joan and Dick and Pepper and baby," she said savagely. "You're a nasty, ugly, horrid family."

"That is enough," said Betty angrily. "I give you ten minutes to finish undressing, then I fetch away your light. You certainly are a most unlovable child."

She went away and shut the door again, and Nancy closed her book and again returned it to its hiding-place under the wash-stand. Then she blew out the candle and put it outside the door, calling out—

"I've saved your breath for you," as she did so. Half way across the room a thought struck her.

"Then I don't belong to Dot!" and it was as if a knife had been drawn across her heart. She called it out shrilly:

"I don't belong to Dot—to my own, beautiful Dot!"

A sob got into her throat.

"Dot couldn't be a foundling, too—Oh! oh!"

She flung herself down on the bed beside golden-haired Joan, and began to cry miserably. "Oh, if I only belonged to Dot I wouldn't mind—oh! oh! I wish I was dead—yes, I do, I do."

At ten o'clock Betty gave the baby her bottle, and poor little heart-broken Nancy was still awake, still sobbing. Her face was swollen, her eyes and head and throat ached. No thought of undressing or of going to sleep came to her. She had never felt so miserable, so outcast, so wicked before. And she just lay there, sobbing and muttering and staring at the unblinded window.

At eleven o'clock Betty laid down her pen, re-read her newly commenced story, hastily undressed and blew out her light. Then brain-excited and weary, she crept into bed beside Pepper.

She was happy beyond expression, for her pen had flown and the sheer joy of composition was upon her. She had not even a stray thought for Nancy. All she did was to luxuriate in the new heaven that had gathered round her to-night.

But presently she longed for sleep, and she

began to count steadily up to a hundred. Then she imagined sheep getting through a gate, one by one, and then she gathered Pepper into her arms, put her flushed cheek on his curly head, held one of his feet in her hands, and stole after him into the happy land of youthful sleep wherein the passing of twelve hours is but as a moment.

At half-past eleven Mr. Bruce put down his pipe and pen, and sat in absolute silence and solitude, just thinking and very sad.

Then the shadows of midnight seemed to encompass him, and he tried to shake them off.

So he lighted his candle, blew out his lamp, and took his way down the passage to the bedrooms.

He passed Betty's shut door, and came to Nancy's, which stood just ajar. He pushed that open and entered. Then he placed the candle on the chest of drawers and went towards the bed, seeking comfort only.

The bed stood well away from either wall. He went round to Joan's side first and stood looking at her. Then he stooped and kissed her and smoothed back the curls from her face, and then he went round to the little foundling. She lay there half undressed, on

her back, her arms folded over her; the tears were wet on her cheeks, but she, too, was in the beautiful land of dreams.

Even in the dim light Mr. Bruce saw she was but half undressed, and he smiled.

"I suppose she is going to race one of the others in the morning," he said, and he stooped over her and lifted her in between the sheets, arranged the bedclothes, and tucked her in. Then he kissed her—perhaps a little oftener than he had kissed Joan—and he went away, comforted.

But though Nancy laughed in her sleep and called out play talk to some one, she had no knowledge of the kisses.

In the morning she was surprised at first to find she had not undressed. Then she remembered a little and then a little more. But she forgot that she had not crept into the smooth reaches of the sheets before sleep came. Her head ached still, and a great heaviness hung over her, from overmuch crying.

She felt very cross this morning—and looked it.

Betty, who was not clad in the blue apron, who rose late and skipped the children's baths, and gave Cyril sixpence with which to buy his lunch, had hardly a look to spare for Nancy.

She certainly said—

“Nancy, go and bring in some more butter. Nancy, you’re quite old enough to help some one beside yourself. Give Dick some brown sugar.” Then later—

“I’ve a good mind, Nancy, to let you stay at home to-day to mind baby.”

But Nancy made an ugly grimace.

“Won’t,” she said, “*I’ve* not got school-fever.”

CHAPTER VI

THE CROOKED PATH

"Alas, how easily things go wrong."

BETTY did not consult her list this morning at all; indeed, she forgot she had ever made one. From sheer routine she bathed and fed the baby and made the beds, but all the while her mind was wandering elsewhere.

Just before he left, her father looked at her and said:

"Copy out that story, Betty. We'll send it over the seas, and do another on the same lines. Better do a series. We'll talk it over to-night."

Already, while making the beds, she had thought out story number two, and she was all a-tremble with excitement.

Yet, oh! the pathos of it! There was a house and family dependent absolutely upon her housewifely ministrations. She sought slipshod Mary, and spoke to her almost wheedlingly.

"Mary," she said, "if we let all the house-work go for to-day, do you think you could just manage the cooking and to amuse the children? I *have* such a lot of writing to do."

"Of course I can," said Mary, with fine scorn, yet she had never "managed" the simplest dinner without spoiling it, and never undertaken it without showing contempt for the mistrust placed in her powers.

"For the children's dinner," said Betty, trying earnestly to bring her mind to household affairs, "just a nice, milky sago pudding. You can make that. And well-mashed potatoes and the cold meat. They had a good dinner yesterday."

"Um," said Mary.

"For our dinner to-night," went on Betty, "there's cold meat."

"Yes. You said you'd have a curry, you know."

"I think not," said Betty hurriedly; "made-up dishes are not nearly as wholesome as once cooked meat. No; we'll have it cold—and mashed potatoes, and a mould of boiled rice with jam for pudding."

"We had that yesterday," said Mary, laughing contemptuously.

"Well, the Chinese live on rice," said Betty. "It's most nutritious. Yes, that'll do, Mary. It's all the same in a week whether we have roast duck or cold mutton. It doesn't do to think too much of one's food. Now, don't forget—sago pudding, boiled potatoes, and rice. That's all you have to remember. You needn't come near me for anything."

She turned away from the kitchen, and there were three eager little children curbing their impatience in the passage. They all fell on her at once, and they all spoke at once.

Joan said—"I've got your little fork and your gardening hat, and—and everything."

And Dick said—"I'm waiting to fall my tree till you come, Betty; it's almost down, but it's got a hundred roots, and I'm only through three."

And Pepper said—"I keep filling a 'lower pot with water for you, and it keeps lunning out by the little 'ole in the bottom. Come and see."

"Now, children," said Betty firmly, "I can't come to-day; I'll give you a whole day to make up soon. But to-day Mary says she'll keep playing with you instead."

"Oh dear!" wailed Joan, "and I've *been* so miserable waiting for you for *ever* so long.

Oh! I'm sure I can't do without you for any longer, Betty. Mary wouldn't do at all."

"Well, you'll simply have to do without me," said Betty. "If you're all good, I'll give you bread and butter with sugar on it for your tea; I'll tell you a story at bedtime; I'll do anything for any of you. But I must be alone now—oh, I must."

She almost ran down the passage to her own room, and she quite slammed the door.

"The cares of a State are not in it to the cares of a household," she told herself, as she sat down to the table. She drew towards her the writing that had so excited her last night, and then—there came a knock at the door, and Mary's face peeped in.

"I thought I'd come afore you got settled," said the girl blandly. "You forgot to give me the butcher's order, and he'll be here directly."

"Oh dear!" wailed Betty, "why doesn't he come at a different time? A nice leg of mutton."

"We're only just finishing one," reminded Mary.

"Well—chops! Chops are very useful. Grilled—curried haricot. Chops, Mary."

"How many?"

"Oh, four pounds. Do shut the door and

let me alone." Silence again. Betty wandered round the room three or four times to quieten her thoughts; then came back to her table and drew her story close.

Another knock at the door. Again Mary's face peeped in.

"I can't help injerruptin' you," she said forlornly, "but I forgot to ask 'ow much bread."

"Oh, a thousand loaves," said Betty in wild despair, "take two."

Mary withdrew very quickly, and Betty's face fell forward into her hands.

"It's too cruel!" she said. "How *can* I write? How can I even think? I'll give it up—I'll give it up."

But she tossed back her head and started again, her lips firmly pressed together, a look of resolution on her young troubled face.

And again the door opened, this time without any preliminary knocking, and Mary, looking really afraid, stood in the doorway once more.

"Before you go back to your writing," she implored, "we 'aven't got no rice."

"I'm busy," said Betty imperiously.

"I didn't get back to the kitchen when I remembered," said Mary.

"Shut the door," ordered Betty.

"You said boiled rice for puddin', and there ain't a single scrap of a grain in the 'ouse. Will I do boiled sago instead?"

"You can do boiled salt if you like!" said Betty wildly, "and look here, if the house burns down don't open this door again."

It took her longer this time to quieten her distracted mind. But at last she was sitting down once more in an attitude for work—chin resolute, eyes shining, pen in hand. And as she wrote she forgot to listen for the turning of the door handle. She forgot to think Mary might be thirsting to know this or that; she forgot to expect the three walking babies battering at the door.

And time passed and the beautiful silence endured. Her pen flew over the papers, her cheeks burned, her heart regulated its pace solely according to the story. Oh, the glory of that absolute silence, the beauty of the closed door!

Her mind flew through space. The joy of conceiving and executing was her own—the joy of creating!

Page after page she covered, and her work was good. She felt certain of it before she read it over, partly because of the enthusiasm she had put into it, partly because she had ac-

tually felt and quivered over what she had written.

Afterwards—some time during the silence—she read over what she had written, and her face glowed and she read it again.

Then she put it down. It was finished. She hastily counted over lines, words, pages, and multiplied, and found she had written three thousand words.

“Three thousand words in——” she turned round for the clock just as footsteps came down the passage.

Well, she was ready for any one now. She waited, looking at the door and forgetting all about the clock. Such a pervading sense of well-doing was over her that she felt benevolent to even a world of butchers and grocers demanding orders for “to-morrow.”

This time the door was thrown back and Mary, very white and startled-looking, stood outside in the passage.

“It’s not my fault, any’ow,” she said. “You said even if the ’ouse was burnin’ I wasn’t to injerrupt you; and I didn’t—and I minded the children, and ——”

“Well,” said Betty, smiling, “what is it? Is the pudding burnt?”

“It’s worse than that,” said Mary, almost

crying. "I just remembered the baby's——"

"Oh!" said Betty, and started to her feet,—"the bottle! I'd forgotten. What's the time? A quarter past one? Oh, it must be wrong." She hurried to the door. "She's had nothing since nine o'clock—oh!"

"And I went for her," continued Mary, quite crying now, "and I looked—and—she's gone."

"Gone!" shouted Betty.

"Gone!" sobbed Mary.

"Gone," said Betty, and ran madly down the passage, through the dining-room to the apple tree, under which a hammock had been swung for every little Bruce, from herself down to this new six-months-old one.

"She couldn't have fallen out," cried Betty, as she ran. "No, I'm certain she must be there."

She reached the hammock. There it hung, a narrow net, swayed lightly by the wind, empty of baby, blankets, pillow, and all.

Betty stared at it blankly, looked round about her at the three other apple trees, at the wavy, brown-green grass, at the vine-covered paling fence not far off.

By this time Mary and the children were

round her, staring at her and the empty hammock.

"I put her there," said Betty; "I'm sure I put her there. Of course I put her there."

Yet a little doubt darkened her mind. She knew so well how blindly she did things when she was engrossed, how her hands acted without confiding in her brain.

"When did I ever put her anywhere else—in fine weather?" she asked Mary and Joan despairingly.

"Once you left her on the dining-room sofa," said Mary.

"So I did," said Betty.

They all trooped indoors again, running, a very faint hope in Betty's heart.

But there was no baby on the old sofa—nothing there at all but the newspaper, one of Joan's dolls, and a duster. Betty laughed half wildly.

"How stupid of me," she said. "Of course, I put her in her own bed. I seem to remember now not putting her into the hammock."

They ran to the bedroom again, but one glance served to show how vain was the quest there.

The dress basket was propped up on the

window-sill to catch the sun's rays, the night blanket was spread beside it.

They looked at the bed—Betty's and Pepper's, carelessly made—but alas, destitute of a baby; at Dick's cot—not made yet—left forgotten by the poor authoress.

"It's a very funny thing," said Dick. "Let's look under the bed." And the three children and absurd Mary looked there.

Betty ran to Nancy's room—a roughly made bed again—and again no baby. She ran to her father's room, to Cyril's, with the same heart-sickening results.

"Oh, where can I have put her?" she cried, pausing at last in the hall. "What *can* I have done with her?"

"I know," said little Dick—"she's fallen in the pond."

"Don't be silly," said Betty irritably.

"I know," said little Joan—"some gypsies have stolen her and took her away."

"She's been stolen, right enough," said Mary, donning a new cheerfulness as a new light was offered to her.

"Don't be so mad," said Betty. "Who wants a six-months-old baby?"

"Plenty people," said Mary darkly; "plenty people steal babies and then sell them

to kind ladies as want babies to adopt. My sister once 'eard of a——"

"I'll send a wire to father," said Betty. "If I sent for Cyril he'd be no good."

She hastily wrote out a telegram, and impressed upon Mary's very deficient intellect how to go about having it despatched.

"On your way back," she said, "fetch Nancy from school. She can mind the children and leave us free to search."

CHAPTER VII

A PHANTOM THIEF

HALF an hour sped by, during which Betty and the children searched every nook and corner of their acre allotment.

There was the paddock, with its few iron barks, its clumps of wattles down near the broken-down, two-rail fence, its pond of clay-colored water, near which, in spite of the children's utmost persuadings, Betty refused to go.

Then there was the ground round about the house, the neglected grass-grown fruit garden, the flower garden, the tiny backyard, and the fowl run.

Among all the fruit trees, among all the flower beds, among the pails and buckets, among the fowls—there was no baby.

They searched the house, the four of them, Dick and Pepper laughing and important, Joan crying, Betty almost frantic. Dining-room, bedrooms, study, kitchen, and hall they searched.

Dick looked in the broom cupboard, and raised the dustpan and hand-brush and black-lead saucer; Joan looked under the cushions, tables and in cupboards; and Betty herself searched outrageous and impossible places; and at last Mary returned.

"I've hurried all I knew," she declared, breathless, "and I kep' my eyes open all the way, I can tell you, but I never saw no one but Murray, the grocer, and a Chinaman."

"Did you look under the bananas in his basket?" asked Dick.

"Did you bring Nancy?" asked white-faced Betty. Mary looked startled.

"I clean forgot," she said.

Joan ran in and caught hold of Betty's hand, her face aglow.

"Oh, Betty," she said, "you know in the 'Seven Little Kids' the Wolf ate all but Grumpy, and he was in the clock. Oh, come and look in the clock!"

"Oh, don't be so silly," said Betty, shaking her off.

But Dick ran to the old grandfather clock in the hall, and applied his little ear to its casement, and came back, flushed and eager. "She's in there," he said. "I heard her cry. Oh! I wish *I'd* thought of the clock."

"Oh, do come, Betty," implored Joan. "I know I heard her give that funny little laughing cry when I just whispered 'Baby.'"

So what was Betty to do but go to the clock? She knew it was utterly and absolutely useless and foolish, but she went, and she even listened for one miserable second outside the door before she fitted in the key and opened it.

But of course, there was no baby. Only a pendulum that had marked the minutes for nearly a hundred years, and the weights and the usual impedimenta of a "grandfather's clock."

"I can't bear it," said Betty with a wild sob, as she turned from the door, leaving it swinging. "I shall go mad. Mind the children, Mary, and I'll go down the road. I'll ask at the store; I'll send word to the police."

She snatched up her garden hat and ran out. Down the path she went and out of the wicket gate. There was a short bush track that led to the red, dusty road.

On the other side of that ran her grandfather's fence—the grandfather who had never forgiven her mother her marriage, and had never acknowledged one of them,

his only grandchildren, but had taken one John Brown, to be to him what six of them should have been.

Betty sped down the road and past the great iron gates. Her imagination, always vivid, raced on agilely ever to fresh fields and pastures new.

She saw a roughly-clad, evil-faced woman slinking up the garden path, glancing furtively at the open doors and windows, pausing, listening, then stealing to the hammock under the apple tree and bending over it. Now, she has hastily lifted Baby and her belongings into her arms—now she is hastening down the path and out of the gate.

Betty groaned as she ran.

She reached the little corner store, the store where she had bought cocoanuts and jujubes and almond rock in the days when she went with Cyril and Nancy to the Preparatory School, in the days when big John Brown had struck terror into Cyril's heart.

Betty hurried to the counter.

The very same august lady, Mrs. Wilkins, was serving out almond rock to an eager-faced school mite.

Betty blurted out her story—the tragic disappearance of a baby.

"I thought perhaps you'd seen her go by this way," she ended.

"How old? Can she walk well?" asked Mrs. Wilkins.

"Six months," said Betty.

"Months?" said the woman.

"Oh," said Betty feverishly, "I forgot to tell you—we have reason to believe she has been stolen. A horrid-looking woman, ragged, wicked; I thought she might have come in here for something."

The lady in the store shook an uneasy head.

"No one came here to-day, Miss Bruce," she said; "no one like that. Only school-children and one poor young lady in black, as I don't know the name of."

Betty's imagination leapt to horse again.

"Which way did she go?" she asked.

"That I couldn't say."

"Had she a baby with her?"

"Not as I noticed. She 'ad a bundle, I remember, 'cause I remember thinking how fragul she looked, and as if the bundle ought to have been carrying 'er."

"She was in black?"

"Yes, 'cause I remember thinking she looked like a young widder or orphan, and I

wondered which. So few wears black out this way."

"You're sure she was young?"

"Yes, 'cause I remember thinking——"

But Betty turned away and almost ran from the store.

The evil-faced woman had slunk into the background; Betty was after another phantom now—a black-gowned, slim-waisted one. She could see her traversing the red country road, tearful-eyed, white-cheeked. She was a mother bereft of her child.

As she passed the white wicket gate of Betty's home she looked in. She saw the peaceful flower garden, the apple tree, the hammock—ah, she saw the hammock and the baby.

There she was, gliding up the path now, hiding behind another apple tree, coming forward now. She has reached the hammock; the baby is in her arms; she is hurrying away. A thief indeed, but a mother almost mad at her loss and this sudden gain!

Betty reached another store—a cottage by the wayside. A bicycle stood outside, leaning, as if wearied, near the wooden cottage wall.

Betty hastened in and had begun her story

before she noticed the bicycle's owner, who was quaffing ginger-beer in the darkened corner near the door.

"I've lost a baby," she said breathlessly. "It's six months old, and I've reason to believe it's been stolen. Have you seen——"

"Betty!" said a tall young man coming forward, half-emptied glass in one hand, the other outstretched.

"Oh, John!" said Betty, in great gladness, "I am glad to see you; and you've got your bicycle—you can help."

"Certainly," said John, and put down his glass. "Come outside."

But Betty turned first to the small, wizened woman behind the counter, and repeated her question—

"Have you seen this morning a young lady in black? She looked very miserable, and was hurrying along, with a little baby in her arms, covered over with a blanket?"

The old woman shook her head.

"Come along outside," said John Brown again, and Betty went.

Outside in the sunshine they looked at each other, and something like a twinkle got into the young man's eyes, though Betty did not see it.

She had pinched and scratched him in schooldays until he, by bullying her, had won respect and obedience from her.

That was five years ago, however, and since then "higher" school days had intervened for Betty, and for him college life. Betty was now a young lady, as the fashion of her hair and gowns testified—so the twinkle was all of merriment the young man showed.

"You want me to find the baby?" he asked.

"Yes," said Betty and clasped her hands imploringly, "as quick as ever you can. First go to the nearest police-station——"

"Give me a few particulars," said John, interrupting her. "I've not seen the infant for a month or more, remember. Male or female?"

"Oh, female," said Betty—"you *know*."

"I'd forgotten, truly. Well—height, complexion, dress? Answers to what name?"

"She's six months old—can she speak?" said Betty, with some of the old fire in her eyes.

"I'm an ass. Well, are there any particular marks about her to distinguish? They can't go and snatch the baby from every black-gowned woman. Any teeth missing—moles or marks?"

Betty stamped her foot.

"Has she got any teeth at six months?" she asked.

"I didn't know," he said humbly. "I *am* an ass!"

"She's got blue eyes," said Betty, "and a tiny bit of soft, silky, golden hair"—her mouth quivered—"she smiles when you look at her—and—and——"

She began to cry dismally, for her very bald description had exactly conjured up the baby's face to her.

"Oh, I say, Betty, don't cry," said John uneasily. "I'll ride till I'm blue trying to find her. But look here, I must know more. Describe the woman in black, will you?"

"She's young," said Betty vaguely, and wiping her eyes, "and thin, very thin. Her face is white, and she looks miserable. She walks very quickly——"

"Now tell me where the baby was and where you all were when she was taken."

"I was writing," said Betty, and she looked ashamed. "I'd shut myself in my room, and was writing and I'd forgotten everything. But I'd put her in her hammock, as usual—you know," for John Brown, schoolboy, had

often seen the Bruce babies take their midday sleep.

He nodded.

"In the garden? Yes."

"Well—then at dinner time Mary and the children came to say she was gone."

"And who saw the woman in black steal her?"

"No one," said Betty, "only of course she must have been stolen. And at Mrs. Wilkins' the only person they saw was a woman in black, and——"

"I see," said John, light breaking upon him. "Had your dinner?"

"As if one thinks of dinner at a time like this!" said Betty indignantly. "Oh, do go, and hurry—hurry! I'll go in the other direction."

She turned away, and John ran his machine out into the road, mounted it and rode off.

The weight at her heart was terrible.

It was but a few short months since her mother's death. There had been no death-bed scene in which the dying mother had extracted a solemn promise from her, Betty, to be a second mother to the children. Yet, nevertheless, she felt the charge of them was

hers, and she was responsible for each one of the little band.

"I will give up writing," she said, as her heavy feet turned homewards. "I'll give it up for ever and ever. I am not fit to be trusted. I must give up either children or writing; and, of course, it must be writing. For ever and ever."

CHAPTER VIII

DOT

"WE might take tea down to the river when Mark comes back," said Mona. She looked across to Dorothea, who was the only occupant of the room except herself.

"Um," said Dot.

"It would be nice."

"I can only get two sleeves if I let the pattern be upside down for one, or wrong side out."

"Suppose I ask Lottie to pack the basket," said Mona, yawning.

"If I could only be content with a narrower sleeve," mused Dot, "it could be done. Not without, except on the before-mentioned terms."

Mona groaned.

"Oh, *do* put your horrible sewing away," she said. "I've not had a sensible word from you the whole afternoon. And it's so hot—how *can* you sew!"

Dot raised her face from her work. On

the coverless table in front of her was a mass of grey and white muslin of softest texture, and Dot, who was clever with her needle and scissors, was converting it into a dressy blouse.

She had a drawer full of dainty, dressy blouses in her room upstairs, and the day was, as Mona said, so hot it seemed unnecessary to labor longer.

"Now you mention it," she said, smiling, "my needle *is* sticky, and I believe I've had enough of it." She began to neatly fold her work together.

"Mrs. Tucker only charges two and six for a washing blouse," said Mona.

"I like making my own things, oh, only daughter of a wealthy squatter," replied Dot.

"Well, I will say you make them better than she does," said Mona. "I can make—to a certain distance. If only one might be collarless and sleeveless, I should get on very well. Now, did you hear the question I addressed to you some time during the last six hours?"

"About tea?" asked Dot.

"Yes. We've been stifling indoors all day. And it's hardly fair to Mark when he has come for a holiday and gets so few."

"There's some of the sandwich cake left,

and I made scones, and there's seed cake," said Dot. "I'll pack the basket."

"Let Lottie," yawned Mona.

"She'd forget half the things," said Dot, "and your brother would spend the afternoon running from the river to the house. Put my work in the work cupboard for me, and I'll go."

She went, singing, down the big hall to the pantry. Quite lately and unostentatiously she had taken more duties into her hands. None were asked of her; she was there, in that fair up-country home, simply for the sake of her sweet companionship.

Mona was motherless and sisterless; her only brother, Mark, was a busy Sydney doctor, and her father a rich retired squatter, with a few agricultural interests.

For five or six years Mona and Dot were boarders at the same school in Sydney, and were what was known as "bosom friends."

Contrary to the rule of violent school friendships, theirs endured past the ending of the second quarter after school days.

Dorothea Bruce, who had many friends, paid a visit to three of them. She went to Katoomba for two scorching summer months with Alma Montague, a great doctor's only

daughter. They stayed with Mrs. Montague, her aunt, and a maid at the best hotel there, played tennis and golf and drove and climbed and enjoyed themselves for two months.

It was all that appeared to be required of Alma in this life, just to be happy and gay; and sometimes, poor, weary, plain daughter of a beautiful, fashionable mother, it was a little more than she could manage.

But for Dot there were other things. She was the eldest of an ever-increasing family. Her father was literary and poor, her mother artistic and delicate. The small children-overrun home called out for an elder daughter. And Dot meant to be one. She had beautiful ideals, and her intentions were, oh, so good!

But this Katoomba visit was such a chance; how could she miss it, or be allowed to miss it? And when that was over, or, rather, before it was over, came another invitation from two "intimate" friends of hers in Tasmania. They simply "could not do without her any longer," and the "Tasmanian season was at its height, and the Tasmanian climate at its best."

So Dot's wardrobe was refurbished, and

she sailed with it and her ideals and intentions over the intervening water stretch.

She still had her ideals, still cherished her intentions to be the stay and staff of her father and mother, the admonisher and helper of wayward Betty and the children.

But circumstances alter ideals and intentions sometimes, even those with the sweetest faces and strongest constitutions. Dot's grew pale and attenuated during that Tasmanian trip, and they faded and faded and lost their life blood, and were well content to be packed away on a shelf with sweet lavender for use "some day."

This was also owing to a letter that came from Mona Parbury's father to Dorothea Bruce's father, and was sent over the water to Dot.

Mr. Parbury said his little daughter (Mona was five feet eight inches) was lonely and miserable. That she was, unfortunately, motherless and sisterless, and that the aunt who had hitherto watched over the home was in failing health. And he begged almost pathetically that Dot might be allowed to make his home hers, and be a sister to Mona. In return, they would take great care of her, and make her as happy as possible, and (oh,

wondrous thing in that poor family of Bruces!) give her forty pounds a year as pocket money.

So Dot started a new family of ideals and intentions when she went to her new home. Life smiled for her, and all its ways were flowery.

Mr. Parbury's house was spacious—a square, white stone building, quite without nooks and corners. It had a wide hall, a wide staircase, lofty rooms, large windows, wide verandas.

It was built to withstand the heat, and Dot found pleasantness in that, for the house at home seemed built to entice it in and keep it there.

There was a beautiful orderly garden around the house, high old walnut trees reached even into the bedroom windows, a river wandered in front, a mere stone's throw from the grassy slope.

There was a boat, a boatshed, and a bathing house; willows drooped on either side of the stream as they should along every well-regulated stream in Australia; and great paddocks rolled away all round one—and they all belonged to Mr. Parbury.

Truly a pleasant home and a goodly one

for Dot or any other girl to be asked to live in and brighten with her presence!

Until lately, Mona and Dot had taken life giddily. They rode and drove and played tennis, and read and sang and played, just as most country girls in their positions do; and they gave parties of all sorts, and went to local dances, even when "local" meant a drive of fifty miles. They ran away from the district each year from January till April, and cooled themselves on the Blue Mountains, or in Tasmania, as they listed.

Then the first cloud came into Dot's sky that had ever found its way there. She lost her mother.

The end came quite suddenly, and poor Dot, who was in Tasmania at the time, could not even say "good-bye," or have one last look at the face she loved the best in the world, in spite of separation and the apparent callousness that had come with the years.

Dot suggested going home then, but Mona fretted and wept and Mr. Parbury wrote another letter to Mr. Bruce, and Mr. Bruce wrote another letter to Mr. Parbury, and Dot remained.

And now that trouble was six months old, and Dot permitted a little whiteness to

lighten the black of her dresses, and her laugh rang out as it used to do.

This afternoon, as she packed the basket for their picnic-tea, she was singing a little song about a blue sea and a blue sky and a blue boat; and Dr. Mark Parbury, coming in by the back door, smiled as he heard the song, and went on his way through the house without entering the pantry.

He had known Dot for many years, now, and he had liked her well in them all. He himself, a busy city man of thirty-five and wide interests, found something very satisfying in this country home, wherein two young girls made the light and music.

Hearing his step, Mona, his sister (and frank worshipper) ran into the hall.

"What has kept you so long?" she asked. "Are there any letters? Have you seen Dot, and did she tell you what we are going to do?"

Her brother laughed.

"Oh, fair maid of many questions in one breath!" he said. "How many am I to reply? Yes. No. Yes. No. Yes."

Dot came out of the pantry, still singing.

"The basket is ready," she said.

"We're going to the river," said Mona;

"you'll come, won't you, Mark? And we'll stay out till it's cool and have songs and fairy stories coming home."

"Of course I'll go," said the doctor genially. "There's a letter for you, Dot. Put it in your pocket till we're in the boat. Now, where are your bonnets?"

He was a big, burly man, this only brother of Mona, a man of few and usually abrupt words and a pleasant laugh. He looked far more like a jovial, rosy-faced squatter than a busy city doctor.

They took their way to the boat—a merry trio—and Dot's letter did not burn a hole in her pocket, because she had looked at the envelope, and recognised Nancy's crabbed caligraphy, and Nancy, of course, could have nothing much to say.

"I have been most profitably engaged all the afternoon," said Mona, when at last they and their boat were slipping down the river. "To all appearances I may have seemed——"

"To have been asleep," put in Dot, laughing. "I suppose you were going to say you were arranging a three-volume novel, and the plot bothered you a little."

"A three-volume book of travels," said Mona, "and the route bothered me a little."

Dot arranged the basket for a footstool, and dabbled her pink fingers in the still waters, and the doctor feathered an oar and looked at pretty Dot. Neither of them seemed to care enough for Mona's book of travels to inquire into it.

"You might at least pretend to be interested in it," said Mona, "for you are both concerned in it. I have written you both down as voyagers."

"Oh," exclaimed Dot equably, "Egypt, and a canopied camel?"

"Iceland and a reindeer?" asked the doctor.

"New Zealand," said Mona. There was determination at her mouth corners. Her eyes glistened.

"Every summer," she went on energetically, "we show about as much originality as a fly. We either go to Sydney or the Mountains or Tasmania. It struck me this afternoon that it was about time somebody altered our route, or we might still be trying the three when we are in bath chairs and and sixty."

"I don't intend to have a bath chair till I'm ninety," said Dot.

"New Zealand," said the doctor.

"We'll take father and Mark," said Mona, addressing Dot.

"Mark must go back to his furrows like a well-trained plough horse," said the doctor.

"Rubbish!" said Mona. "Another month or two would do you all the good in the world. What's one month to a man who's not had more than a week's holiday in five years!"

"And suppose an enemy came while I'm roaming among the snowfields and hot springs, and stole all the grapes from my vineyard?"

"What's a *locum tenens* for but to scare away the enemy?" said Mona saucily. "Now don't be nasty, Mark. Just think how heavenly it would be!"

The doctor looked at Dot. How wondrously the color was racing about in her cheeks! How her eyes were sparkling! What a veritable picture of expectant gladness she made!

"What a pair you are!" he exclaimed.

"It would be lovely," murmured Dot.

"Now!" said Mona triumphantly.

"The most perfect thing I've ever known you to arrange," said Dot.

"There!" said Mona.

For a space no one spoke. Perhaps they all of them were in that southern land of cool winds and hot springs and marvelous beauty.

It was Mona who broke the silence at last—she who rarely allowed any silence to endure.

"Is there any real reason why we shouldn't?" she asked.

"So far as I can see, there is every reason why you should," said the doctor.

"Don't say 'you,' say 'we,'" urged Mona.

"You would come, too," said Dot.

He shook his head.

"You'll spoil the trip for every one if you refuse," said Dot.

"We'll give it up," said Mona.

"No, little girls," said the big man, "it can't be done. My explanation is too involved to give you perhaps—but the fact is, I am honestly too busy making hay to go a-maying. Will that satisfy you? Dot, have you forgotten your letter?"

"Oh!" said Dot, "I had."

She fumbled in her pocket and drew it out. Her face had lost much of its brightness at the finality expressed in the doctor's speech, for she had believed in their power to persuade him.

She turned over the dirty little envelope with its stamp in the left-hand corner, and its well-pressed flap.

"It's only Nancy," she said.

Then she opened it, and began to read, and a smile softened her face as she read.

"Poor little Nancy," she said.

"Of course, she's in trouble," said Mona.

Dot looked over the top of the letter.

"Her world's all topsy-turvy, as usual," she said, "and Cyril is very cross and Betty very nasty, and Baby always crying, and father always busy. Poor Nancy!"

"How old is she?" asked the doctor.

"Eleven," said Dot, "and in a chronic state of trouble. And she's not strong."

"Poor mite," said the big, burly man. He looked at Dot musing. and Dot went back to her letter.

"My own dearest Dot (she read again)

i must write to you for i am so miserable, i don't know who else to tell, everybody is so horrid to me. If i could only see you one day a week i think i could be gooder. i always look at your picture before i go to schule. Betty is getting very ugly, and her fingers are always inky, she had ink on her nose to-day,

and then she called me a pig corse i hadn't cleaned my nales. Cyril is such a crosspach, we only get horrid puddings, and Betty gives Cyril eggs and wrasberry jam for his lunch, and lets me get any old crust that's left. if only it was you at home and Betty away i could be good corse you're so beautiful, and i love you better than anyone in the world. Good-bye, my precious Dot.

“Your miseruble,

“NANCY.

Baby is always crying now, and Dick and Pepper quarrel over their trains all day long.

“P.S.—My hare is not quite as black as it was, i can see a few gold hares coming when i hold it in the sun, it may be like yours sum day, only of corse not so lovely.”

“Poor little Nancy,” murmured Dot.

“Look here,” said the doctor suddenly, “what's there to prevent the child coming here for a holiday? You say she is delicate and everything is topsy-turvy with her.”

The two girls looked at him, Dot's face warming again.

“But—New Zealand,” murmured Mona.

“When you come back, or before you go.”

Mona hardly looked enthusiastic. Having

had Dot to herself for so long, she had grown to regard her as her own, and if truth be told, she did not care about sharing her with anyone—and a child would be such a tie.

"Sometimes," said Dot slowly, "after reading one of Nancy's letters, I feel I *must* put on my hat and run home and stay there and try to make her life happier and Betty's easier, and——"

"How old is Betty?" inquired the doctor.

"She is next to me, and seventeen," said Dot; "and she loves writing and reading, and she's always slipping away and shutting herself up and getting inky, and forgetting every one and everything."

"I see," said the doctor.

"And there's father, who's just like Betty. He would actually forget to put his hat on sometimes to go to town. He's always writing, writing, writing, and his eyes look through you and over your head, and he never sees you."

"That's nothing," said Mona; "father's the same sometimes."

"Not quite," said Dot; "your father knows, for instance, when he has breakfasted, and you could easily persuade mine that he's done so and forgotten it. And then there are four

little children—one a baby. And there's Cyril, and poor Nancy."

"I see," said the doctor again. His eyes were on Dot's flushed face; he had followed her home and seen each member of the family as she spoke.

"And only one half-stupid servant," said Dot, and added warmly, "*Ought* I to be here, floating in a boat, happy and at ease? Oughtn't I to go to the furrows, too?"

She looked at the doctor, and her eyebrows climbed up on her fair forehead. Such a pretty Dot for the furrows of life!

"Don't be silly!" said Mona irritably.

"I'm not sure it is silly," said Dot; "I'm the eldest, and——"

"I dare say Betty is twice as domesticated as you," said Mona.

Dot flushed again, for she had been trying hard to be "domesticated." She was a good pastry cook, and could make delicious puddings and cakes.

She wanted earnestly to be a womanly woman, and a worker. So Mona's peevish insinuation raised a warm flush in her cheeks.

"These sort of moods are quite common in Dot after one of Nancy's letters," said Mona to her brother; "so heed her not. A night's

rest will bring oblivion, and she will be her own self again, until post brings another Nancy letter. Now about New Zealand."

CHAPTER IX

THE CULPRIT

MR. BRUCE had just arrived home, and had surveyed the hammock and the apple tree.

He had tried to extract the meaning of things from Mary's rambling accounts and the children's jumbled ones, and now he stood in bewilderment, staring at the clock's swinging door, and listening to something Joan and Dick were trying to make clear about Grumpy and the Wolf.

Then down the hall came Betty, white and weary from long and fruitless journeyings. The tears welled into her eyes when she saw her father's worried face.

"I got your wire," he said, "and I came at once, but the whole thing is absurd, isn't it? Who on earth would steal a baby?"

Betty shook her head, and swallowed several throat lumps.

"I've heard of people trying to palm one off on other folks," went on Mr. Bruce, "but for anyone to deliberately saddle themselves

with a young baby—why, the thing is absurd.”

Then in at the open hall door came another figure, a very little figure, struggling under the weight of a baby!

It was Nancy, Nancy in her short school frock, hatless, white and wild-looking.

She staggered down the hall, and Betty, with a stifled cry, ran to meet her and to snatch the baby into her own safe keeping.

“I did it!” cried Nancy, “I did it, to pay Betty out! And she’s starving—I did it, and——”

She reeled and would have fallen, only that her father caught her.

Her face was peculiarly white and waxen. Mr. Bruce noticed with a pang the blue veins running into the thin cheeks and making a fretwork on the small temples. Her black hair hung loosely about her white face, her eyelashes made a black fringe on her cheeks—Nancy had fainted.

Mr. Bruce did not heed the baby. He had seen that woollen bundle safe in Betty’s arms and heard her rapturous greeting and cry—

“Darling—darling! Oh, darling!”

He carried his frail little daughter to the dining-room sofa near the window, and let

the breeze play on her face, and he bathed her forehead with cold water and forced a little between her lips.

And presently the black fringed lids opened, and the dark eyes met his. Then remembrance came to the little girl.

"I did it," she said faintly, "I——"

"H'sh," said her father, "we'll talk later. I think the day has been too hot for you."

"I wanted to pay Betty out," whispered Nancy.

But her father shook his head.

"Not now," he said; "I'll listen later. Lie still—don't move; I'm going away for five minutes."

He went to Betty and tapped at her bedroom door. His second eldest daughter sat in the small, warm bedroom on a rocking-chair, the baby in her arms, in one hand a bottle—and the hot tears were running down her face.

"She seems very funny," she said, raising her head as her father entered; "she won't smile and she doesn't want her food."

"Poor little Nancy is very unwell, too," said Mr. Bruce.

"Poor little Nancy?" said Betty indignantly. "It serves her right well, however ill

she is! *I* don't care. She has brought all this on us."

And Nancy was just outside the door, leaning on the door-post, having dragged herself there to hear how the baby was.

"I don't understand the whole business," said Mr Bruce, advancing to look at his youngest born; "but now is not the time to try. Both children are evidently ill, and we must do our best for them."

"I'll not lift a finger for Nancy," declared Betty; "she's more like a malignant imp than a human child! You don't know! Well—never mind her. Look at baby, how white she is. See, I give her my hair to pull—she won't touch it! Look how funny her eyes are, feel how burning her hands!"

"I think," said Mr. Bruce, "it's a touch of the sun."

"Sunstroke!" cried Betty, and her face blanched.

Her father nodded.

"Not very bad, perhaps," he said. "Don't force food on her; I'll go and look in the Book for sunstroke."

"The Book" had entered the family with the advent of Dorothea. It had helped the bewildered father and mother over most nur-

sery stiles—teething woes, rash, mumps, croup, colds, and even measles. For none of the children had the doctor been called in, their distance from his door and the slenderness of the family purse being prohibitive.

Nancy slipped away into her bedroom, her knees shaking and her heart thumping miserably.

She had meant to punish Betty, and to punish her severely—but the baby, the laughing, blue-eyed baby!

She lay down very quietly on the bed, just where she had lain last night when she had meditated upon vengeance, and she tried to think, but somehow thoughts would not come to her, or, having come, would not stay.

She heard her father go down the hall to the dining-room, and she heard Betty call to Mary for a hot bath, and then a great sickness and a drowsiness came over her, and she lay still with shut eyes again.

When she opened them the room had grown darker and held shadows and silence, and her head ached miserably. She moaned a little and began to cry, and then she remembered the happenings of some time ago (she was not sure it was yesterday, to-day, or last week).

Then the door opened, and her father, carrying a lamp, and followed by a short, white-bearded, little gentleman, entered the room.

"As you are here," said Mr. Bruce, "I will ask you to look at her. She has been in a sort of stupor for an hour or two."

"Well, she's not in one now," said the doctor. Mr. Bruce handed him a chair, and he sat down and took the little girl's wrist into the keeping of his thumb and finger, and after a brief silence, said "Um!"

Then he drew out his thermometer and bade her open her mouth and close it again and keep still.

"How old is she? Seven?" he asked Mr. Bruce, and Mr. Bruce looked alarmed at the question.

"Older," he said. "Let me see—er—er—"

The doctor felt her poor little arms, and her thin chest, and he looked at her diminutive length.

"Does she go to school?" he asked.

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Bruce.

"And do home lessons at night?"

"I think so—yes," said Mr. Bruce.

"Has she a good appetite?"

"I really don't know. I think they all have. They are never ill."

The doctor took the thermometer from the little girl's mouth, and Nancy immediately said—

"I'm ten and three-quarters!" being prouder of her years than of anything else she owned—"nearly eleven."

"Eleven!" said the doctor, surprised. Then smiling—"Why, I've a little girl at home and she'd make two of you, and she's only nine. Do you like porridge?"

"Not our sort," said Nancy.

"Well, you like milk. Nice, creamy milk—eh?"

"I don't know," said Nancy. "I don't think so. I drink tea."

"And puddings?"

"Not our sort," said Nancy, "I like the puddings in the pictures in the cookery book."

Mr. Bruce and the doctor laughed.

"Ah, well," said the doctor, and he rose from his chair and looked around him with a view to washing his hands. Mr. Bruce led the way to his own room, carrying the lamp. Then he found there was no water in his jug, and he had to fetch it from the bathroom, and

when he had poured out the water he had to go to Mary for a clean towel. By the time he came back again he felt unusually irritated.

"The sun has not hurt the little girl," said the doctor, "beyond a sharp headache, perhaps. She wants more sunshine—more milk—more play."

"They get plenty of play," remarked Mr. Bruce, who was used to seeing little figures continually about the garden.

The doctor dried his hands.

"The child is undersized," he said—"undeveloped. She needs plenty of care, and plenty of nourishment if she is ever to make a woman. Give her cod liver oil; best thing in the world for her. Now, about the baby. Absolute quiet and the powders. I'll look in again in the morning."

Mr. Bruce wandered to his study quite mechanically after he had closed the door on the doctor. He stared unseeingly upon his paper-strewn table, unthinkingly he picked up a book and stood for a while turning over its leaves.

His table was full of work, urgently needing his attention, but he could not bring his mind to it.

Again he saw the doctor's surprised look when Nancy had stated her age; again he heard the doctor's—

"Why, I've a little girl at home, and she'd make two of you!"

"I'll go and speak to Betty," said Mr. Bruce aloud, and he put down his book and left the study. Then he remembered the doctor's orders about the quietness essential for the baby, and he went kitchenwards.

There the three little children were at the table, eating their evening meal of bread and jam.

It occurred to Mr. Bruce to wonder if their appetites were good.

"Do they eat plenty?" he inquired of Mary, and his worried glance went from her to the munching trio.

"Rather," said Mary expressively, "that's Dick's third slice, and Pepper's singing out for his before he's finished what he's got."

"But usually—always?" asked the father.

Mary laughed from ear to ear.

"I dunno," she said, evidently thinking her master suddenly facetious.

"The doctor has been," said Mr. Bruce, "and he says the house is to be kept very quiet. Don't let the children go near Miss

Betty on any account. If anything is needed, let them come to me."

"And where'll they sleep?" asked Mary.

"Sleep?" said Mr. Bruce, confronted with a new difficulty, and then promptly surmounting it. "Let Dick sleep with Mr. Cyril, put Pepper into my bed; Joan, of course, sleeps with Nancy. And you must be very quiet, Joan, do you hear me?"

He went away, shutting the kitchen door to close in all sounds, and he walked along the passage to Betty's room very thoughtfully.

Betty sat in the semi-darkness of her room, her arms folded across her chest, her eyes staring straight in front of her.

When her father put his head in the doorway her eyes left the blank wall for his face, but she did not alter her attitude.

She was miserable, miserable beyond words or tears.

Her imagination had been racing into the future, and it was a very active, very vivid imagination; so she had seen many things in many to-morrows, and they were all sorrowful happenings, sad and sombre exceedingly.

Her father beckoned to her, and she rose, and bending over the baby for another glance, went to him.

They walked a little way down the passage, almost to Nancy's door.

"Did the doctor say anything else?" asked Betty.

"I took him in to see Nancy, as he was here," said Mr. Bruce; "I thought it wiser."

A shade of anxiety came into Betty's eyes.

"Is *she* sun struck?" she asked.

"No," said her father, "merely a very bad headache. But he wasn't satisfied with her. He says she is undersized—very small."

"She always was," said Betty, "we've always laughed at her for being so small. Joan will catch up to her very soon."

"And she's very thin," pursued Mr. Bruce.

"She's of the thin kind," said Betty. "Lots of people never grow fat, however much they eat. Why, daddie, who could be thinner than you? Yet you're never ill."

"Very true," said Mr. Bruce, and he brightened up considerably. "I suppose she takes after me. Does she eat well?"

Now Betty knew amazingly little about Nancy—her appetite, her sleep, or her ways. But she supposed she ate and slept well. Joan did—so why not Nancy?

"As well as the others," she said impatiently. "Nancy is well enough, and would be

better only for her fractious temper. She's always cranky or crying, always quarrelling with some one. What she really wants is boarding-school, the same as Dot and I had."

"Very possibly," said Mr. Bruce, and he brightened still more. "It hadn't occurred to me."

"Baby seems no worse," said Betty, "but I wish the powders would come. The second Cyril comes home send him off for them. Don't let him wait for his tea."

Betty was going away when she turned and looked at her father again.

"We've none of us had any tea," she said. "I'll tell Mary to give you yours in the study."

"Don't forget Nancy," said her father.

But Betty was still bitter.

"She deserves dry bread and water," she said.

"I think *I* do, Betty," said her father; "I've very much the feeling that it's all me, someway."

"It's me," said Betty, and her face darkened and her eyes glowed. "How can it possibly be *you*? I shut my door on house, children and baby—and why, why?" Her voice was trembling.

"Never tell me to write again," she said.

"I'll never touch a pen, not though I live to be ninety and ache to write every moment of every year."

She broke away from him, crying, or rather, choking down dry sobs. Poor, highly-strung Betty!

Saddened more than before, Mr. Bruce turned back into the wider hall off which the bedroom passage branched. And there stood John Brown at the dining-room doorway, looking up and down and round about him, for some, any member, of the household.

"Ah, John," said Mr. Bruce.

"Good evening, Mr. Bruce," said John. "I hope you've better news for me than I for you. I've been to the police station, and I've made all possible inquiries, but——"

Mr. Bruce looked bewildered.

"For the baby," said John, and then wondered for one fleeting moment whether it was one of Betty's escapades, and her father did not know.

"Ah—ah," said Mr. Bruce; "thank you very much, but the baby is found, but very ill. Ah—Cyril."

Cyril, bag in hand, was just entering the hall, and Betty's injunction to hurry him off was fresh in her father's mind.

"I want you to go at once to the nearest chemist——"

"Not before tea!" said Cyril amazed.

"At once!" repeated his father. "Baby is ill and——"

"Well, I'm hanged," said Cyril, and he put down his bag and hat, "before a fellow has time to breathe, and the nearest chemist is four miles off, and——"

"I'll go," said John obligingly; "I've my machine here, and I can be there and back again before Cyril could get to the tram."

Cyril beamed on John. A minute ago he had given him a churlish greeting, having many grudges against the big young man beside the old one, that he wore the shoes his grandfather ought to have put on his, Cyril's, feet.

The prescription fluttered in Mr. Bruce's hands, then in John's.

"You can time me if you like," said John, as he quitted the house.

CHAPTER X.

BETTY'S SACRIFICE

IT was midnight, and a great hush lay upon the house of the Bruces. All excepting Betty slept.

An hour ago Mr. Bruce had wearily sought his bedroom, and lain down beside his youngest son.

Two hours ago Cyril, disgusted at a fate which had thrust Dick upon him as a bed-fellow, had betaken himself grumblingly to sleep.

Nancy, tealess (for Betty had forgotten her after all), and crying from headache and hunger, had fallen into troubled sleep, fully dressed, beside golden-haired Joan.

Baby had, after wild protestations, swallowed a third powder, and now slumbered more like a baby simply tired.

Only Betty watched.

She had had one solemn midnight hour, one long, uninterrupted hour, and in it she had renounced herself, given up voluntarily her Par-

adise, and chosen, instead, a long treeless waste of life—the path of Duty.

As midnight came she approached the table.

There were standing upon it two large biscuit tins and one eight pound tin, all well corded and placed together.

Betty looked at them for a lingering minute, lighted the lantern she had placed beside them, and left the room, carrying the lantern and the heavy tea tin.

She went quietly to the dining-room, out by a French window, across the veranda, and down the garden to the apple tree under which the hammock swung itself like something cold and neglected.

Betty set her tin on the ground, then returned to the house and her bedroom.

She leaned over the baby and listened to her regular breathings, then lifted the biscuit tins into her arms, and once more left the room and journeyed to the apple tree.

Then she went to where the garden tools were kept (an open shed in the yard), then back again, carrying a spade this time.

And then she began to dig. After several spadefuls of earth had been vigorously thrown aside she stopped and addressed the stars.

"It is myself I am burying here," she said

tragically. "Surely one cannot offer a greater sacrifice than to bury oneself alive!"

She dug again, and again stopped.

"The burial will not kill me," she said; "I shall live—live on, live underground for perhaps two score of years. Every day of my life I shall be suffocating—dying."

She dug again, and again addressed the stars. The grave she was making was yawning larger and larger; it would hold the tea tin now.

"Abraham's sacrifice was no greater," she said, "yet God pitied him so that He saved him making it. Yet I shall not be saved!"

She began to cry. The dreariness at her heart was unspeakable; her hands were hot and trembling, her head ached, and her eyes smarted. She was burying her best beloved, her papers, her pen, all that she had written; the beginnings of stories to be her dearest hopes.

And it was midnight and starshine, for she had chosen the hour when there should be none to see, none to know. She looked at the stars and listened.

Perhaps she expected to hear a voice from the sky bidding her stay her hand.

But none came, not even a whisper.

The grave yawned larger and deeper, little by little. The digging was in reality a labor, for the ground, though it had been worked, had been well trodden by little feet.

Betty's back ached, but because of the ache at her heart she was hardly conscious of it. The spade hurt her hands, the tears wet her cheeks, but she knew nothing of these things. All she knew was that she was burying the best part of herself under the apple tree, and that the sacrifice was demanded.

To-day's sufferings had outlined the future as well as illuminated the past.

The beautiful life of romance, the bliss of creating heroes and heroines, of living the only life worth the taking up, was to be hers no longer.

A life of cooking, of mending and making, of dusting and children-minding stretched before her.

She had seen to-night, with that keen, subtle sight that belonged to her, that she might not, under any circumstances or conditions, have both lives. The one she must nourish and labor in, heart, brain, hand—the other she must sacrifice and bury. No compromise, no palliation!

The grave yawned and yawned; it was deep

enough now, hungry enough—ah, greedy enough!

Betty knelt down, sobbing, sobbing, and she lifted in the largest tin. It fitted in, on the farthest side, neatly, and as if born to the position.

Then together, and side by side with it, she placed the others. Then the pen.

In the innocence and freshness of its youth, it had been merely a twopenny wooden pen. But what had it not become with years! She opened the tea-tin lid, dropped it in, her beloved, her pen.

Then, on the top of all, the school-time, glass ink-bottle, that one could tip over and it would not part with its contents, and drop it and it would not break.

It had been to bed with Betty, and not soiled the sheets; it had travelled in her pocket, and left the pocket none the worse for its companionship. A faithful friend!

She stood it on the top of the tin, and then she rose from her knees and began to fill in the grave.

In ten minutes she was in her bedroom again, the spade in the shed, the lantern in the hall.

All was over, all buried, all done with!

The dull ache of bereavement was at her heart; her hands were so cold, so cold; her head was throbbing, her eyes were dark with tears!

Those who have placed their living hopes in the cold earth, have strewn the dust over them themselves at midnight, and have been, in the doing of it, in the suffering of it, only seventeen, may know how Betty felt.

CHAPTER XI

THE CHOICE

JOHN BROWN was nineteen and college bred. He was big and plain, and usually shy-mannered and clumsy.

At home—at Captain Carew's—he had a way of slouching about the large grounds as if he had nothing in the world to do, and æons and æons to do it. In the house he frequently sprawled on sofas, a book open on his chest, and his eyes shut.

Captain Carew, who, through his own irascibility and stubbornness, had deprived himself of eight grandchildren (which is counting the six-months-old Bruce baby), had adopted John Brown at the age of thirteen, and having adopted him, he, after the fashion of stubborn, rich and lonely old men, built tremendous hopes upon him.

He persisted that John was clever, though he could never quite make up his mind what form his cleverness took.

At school he certainly did well, even re-

markably well at mathematics. But the captain did not care much about mathematics.

Wishing to be fair and liberal, he asked John (at fifteen) what he would like to be, merely making suggestions—doctor, barrister, lawyer, architect.

But John, a cricketer then, could only say the champion cricketer of the world.

And time passed, and John reached the age of seventeen and matriculated, and had the same questions even more eagerly asked by the same ambitious old man. But this time John only said he didn't know, whereby he, of course, meant he hadn't thought.

And time went on, and the old man eagerly watched his adopted grandson for a sign—any sign—of what he was going to do in the world, of what he was going to be. But John went on being a slouching youth, who read a great deal, or rather, who dipped into a great many books, and then wandered off into some other realm, leaving his book unheeded before him.

He cricketed, he played football and tennis, he cycled and took photographs, and he spent a fair allowance of money at College.

So, finding John was not likely to make up his mind on the momentous question, the cap-

tain, who had really been forbearing and just, began to make up his. And having begun he went on steadily and ceaselessly.

He decided that John should be a doctor, a great physician—he rather inclined to him being a great surgeon. People thought so much of one, he reasoned, for being able to slash away with a knife at a poor human body.

He made quite a study of the lives of eminent surgeons, and he decided to send John to London or to Edinburgh as soon as his next University term was ended.

He watched John furtively for the week before he unfolded to him his great decision, seeking a sign that John's thoughts were even as his own.

And at last he put the question to him once again. It was twilight, and John was treading the wide veranda in loneliness. He was not slouching, nor were his eyes half shut, nor his shoulders hunched up. He looked very wide awake, and he was walking quickly, just staring in front of him.

The captain came out of the front door and said—

“John,” but John just kept on walking hard.

Then the old man went to what he called

his deck chair and sat down, and put his empty pipe in his mouth, and took it out, and looked into its wanting bowl, and said "John" again.

"Yes," said John, stopping in front of him.

"I'd like a bit of a yarn with you to-night. I've been intending it for a good while now."

"Yes," said John again. He had nothing particularly heavy on his conscience, so he was not uneasy.

"It's now over a year," said the captain, "since I asked you to pick and choose your profession. And for any time during the year I've been expecting the answer from you. Have you got it ready now?"

"No, not quite," said John.

"And the years are going on," said the old man. "The general run of young men are not offered a choice. I've not treated you that way, John. I've given you your choice of profession, only I want you to make a choice."

John did not speak, but he began to walk up and down again, somewhat slower than before.

"Well?"

"Well," said John.

The captain lost a little of his patience.

"What do you want to be?" he asked.

John went on walking. Then he laughed; something about the question evidently amused him.

The captain lost a little more of his patience.

"What do you want to be?" he repeated.

"I don't know," said John.

The captain put his pipe in his pocket.

"Then it's time you did," he said. "It's time you did. When are you going to make up your mind? Are you going to wait till you're forty? You're a man now, I'd have you know, not a boy—a young man. Do you suppose anyone ever asked *me* what I'd rather be, and if I'd kindly take my choice, and they'd stand me treat to anything in moderation?"

"That's just it," said John hotly. "What right have I?"

But the old man was too indignant to heed him.

"When I was ten years old," he said, "I was left to the charity of an uncle with a dozen children of his own. I got more kicks than kind words, I can tell you. Do you suppose *I* cared? I stood it for a certain time, then I ran away and began life on my

own account; I'd sixpence in my pocket to start with! Look where I stand to-day! It was all grit and hard work, and hard work and grit."

"I know," said John quietly; "and it's something to be prouder of than wearing other people's shoes. I——"

"Oh, I'm not proud of it," said Captain Carew irritably; "only it seems to me that nowadays there's less grit and hard work in the world than there was when I was young. The young men think too long before they leap; some of them go on thinking till they're too stiff-jointed to leap at all, and they shirk hard work; they hang round their fathers, and ask for a little nice work that'll keep their hands soft and their purses fat——"

"Do you think I'm that sort?" said John hotly. "I'll soon show you what I've been thinking of——"

"I've been asking you for years now," went on the old man discontentedly, "what you'd like to be. I asked you to-night—you *didn't* know. So, as you won't make up your mind, I'll make up mine. You'll be a surgeon."

"A surgeon?" exclaimed John, amazed.

"Ay! a surgeon."

John shook his head.

"I don't think I'm taking any knife, thank you," he said.

"Well, then—a doctor, a doctor, a doctor!"

Again John shook his head.

"I don't think I'm taking any prescriptions," he said.

The old man's eyes blazed, but he managed to restrain himself.

"Perhaps a lawyer is more in your line," he said.

"I'm afraid I'm not cut out after the legal pattern, although I rather fancy myself as a judge, I must say."

And then the old man lost his last fragment of patience.

"You'll be a surgeon," he snapped, "and you'll be the best surgeon that it's in you to make. You can go to London for your learning. But you'll be a surgeon; I've had my mind fixed on that for years."

John shook his head, but he did not speak. He was thinking too hard for words.

"But you will," persisted the old man who, since his fiat had gone forth, was as stubborn as the proverbial stone wall.

He got up and went indoors, leaving John to the veranda and his own long, long thoughts.

CHAPTER XII

HOME TROUBLES

THE post had just brought Dot another letter from Nancy. It was but rarely that she received two in a fortnight, letter-writing being a labor to poor Nancy, and stamps (and Dot's were twopenny ones) items of consideration.

Yet here was the second letter, placed beside her on the dining-room table.

Dot was alone in the dining-room writing; the time was evening and the lamps were alight.

Upstairs, in her bedroom, Mona was trying to sleep away a severe headache.

Dot was making a list, a list full of interest to herself. It had to do with the outfit necessary for the New Zealand trip (now almost decided upon), and the clothes she could make herself, and those it would be wiser to put out to be made or to buy ready made.

And she was trying to calculate the cost of the outfit and to cut it down as much as pos-

sible, to leave money for mementoes and presents, etc., as she went journeying.

"Only one shop-trimmed hat," she soliloquised; "I'll do up my other, and buy one new. Let me see—suppose I limit myself to thirty shillings for hats."

She wrote on a separate piece of paper from that, setting forth her wants—"Hats, thirty shillings."

The door opened, and in came Mr. Parbury. His rosy, jovial face looked jovial as ever, and he carried a slouch hat and a whip in one hand and a letter in the other.

"I'm late home," he said, and he patted Dot's shining head.

"Thirty shillings," said Dot reflectively; "it seems a good bit—Oh, you're home at last! We waited tea for nearly an hour."

She slipped one hand into Mr. Parbury's, and left it there caressingly for a minute.

"I stayed tea at the Styles'," said Mr. Parbury. "I looked in about a fencing matter I wanted to see Joe over. Where's Mona?"

"We went for a long ride this morning," said Dot, "and missed our dinner, and Mona got one of her headaches. She's in bed."

"And where's Mark?"

"I *think*," said Dot—"I *think* he's in your

den, writing. He said he was going to be busy."

"Here's a letter for you," said Mr. Parbury, and he laid the badly-written envelope beside the neatly-written list. "I'll go to Mark."

Dot looked at the envelope.

"Only Nancy," she said. Then she looked back at her list.

"One serviceable travelling dress," she said; "I'll get Miss Baker to make it—material, say £1; making, 12s. 6d. Oh, I'd better allow a little for extras, making, say fifteen shillings."

She wrote again.

"I'm afraid it's going to cost me a lot," she said. "It's surprising how much it costs to dress nowadays, and I'm *not* extravagant."

She bit her pen handle and stared in front of her.

"Am I extravagant?" she asked herself earnestly, "because I won't be—I won't be. Mona spends five times what I do; she throws away dresses I'd alter again and wear, and even then, after *that*, send home for Betty or Nancy."

Which last thought recalled the letter.

"Poor little Nancy!" she said, as usual, as

she slit the envelope. Then she spread open the sheet of ruled exercise paper Nancy had written on and laid it over her own list.

There was no "My own beautiful Dot" or "My precious Dot." It seemed to begin in a hurry.

"Oh, everything is so miserable," it said, "and I wish I was dead—and I believe I'm dieing and they're keeping it from me. Baby has been nearly dead, too, and Betty is horridder than ever. Yesterday, when I was so ill, father fetched the doctor, and he shuke his head when he looked at me, and he said his little girl would make two of me, and she is only ten, and I am neerly twelve, and he thought I was seven, and he just kept shaking his head, and then went out of the room, and Betty says I'm a foundling, and don't belong to you and father, and that I'm adopted becorse my mother left me on a doorstep. So I'm going to run away in the bush to die. Only first I'm coming to see you, Dot, becorse I love you best in the world. I've only got one shilling and fourpence, but I only take half-tickets in the trane.

Good-bye, my own beautiful Dot,

"The foundling,

"NANCY NOBODY."

Dot was bewildered, and read through the letter again. Then she put down her pen, pushed her list away, and read it again. And then she leaned back in her chair and stared blankly in front of her.

It was a disturbing letter to read. Dot, who did not know very much about her brothers and sisters, wondered if Nancy, for one serious second, thought of undertaking that journey of four hundred miles that lay between her North Country home and their North Sydney one—or rather, of trying to undertake it.

In imagination she saw Nancy again, saw her white, delicate face and large, dark eyes, her mass of black hair. She was like a strange, wild bird, alone, alone.

Then Dot began to feel angry with Betty for ignoring the child.

How invariably unkind she seemed to be, and how acutely poor little, tender-hearted Nancy felt it! And was it possible Betty could have called her a foundling?

Dot's heart grew colder and colder towards Betty, and warmer and warmer towards neglected Nancy. Always she had a tenderer feeling for Nancy than for any of them. Perhaps, indeed, most probably because of

Nancy's frank adoration of herself, and again, perhaps, because they were so dissimilar—blue-eyed, golden-haired Dot, black-haired, black-eyed Nancy; Dot with her even, placid temperament, Nancy with her criss-cross wayward one.

"I suppose," said Dot to herself, "I suppose Betty spoils Joan and quite forgets Nancy. Poor little thing! I think I'll write to Betty and scold her well."

But a remembrance of Betty came—Betty, who would never brook an elder sisterly word, who scorned anything approaching a rebuke from Dot; Betty, who invariably met all her attempts at lecture-giving with flashing eyes, stamping feet, and closed ears.

"It's no use," said Dot regretfully, "she would never read it. No, it's no use writing. Whatever shall I do?"

She sat pondering for a long while, and growing bitter with Betty.

At last she picked up the letter and went to Mr. Parbury's den—a small room of many books, guns, stock-whips, aboriginal curios, and fishing-rods, a room sacred to the use of the master of the house, and (when he happened to be there) his son, Mark.

Dot tapped at the door and turned the handle.

"May I come in, Dr. Mark?" she asked, and her fresh young face came into the region of the lamplight.

The doctor looked up. He was writing hard and furrows were on his forehead. Yet it was possible he was not making a list of his outfit for New Zealand and trying to make a five pound note do the duty of a ten.

"Of course, you may," he said hospitably, and he rose and placed a chair at the untidy table for her.

"I'm in such a dreadful fix," said Dot, "and I don't know whatever to do. *Will* you help me?"

She pushed her letter over to him, and he began to read and the furrows went away from his forehead, and a new look came to his face and a small smile to his mouth corners.

"Poor little lassie," he said when he had finished, but Dot was not sure whether he meant her or Nancy.

"Nancy is the one who is always in grief, isn't she? Or is it Betty?" he asked.

"Oh, Nancy," said Dot; "Betty's quite old, over seventeen."

"Oh, quite!" said the doctor, "people of such advanced age do not know what trouble is, do they?"

"What I meant was," said Dot, laughing, "Betty is old enough not to make troubles of trifles; and she has her writing as compensation for worries. Nancy simply imagines half her troubles, and she has no compensation."

"I know what you mean," said the doctor. "What do you think about her being ill?"

"She always has been different from the others; but none of us ever wanted a doctor before."

"Nancy seems to be an extreme case. Of course, this is sheer folly about setting off to see you."

"I don't know," said Dot doubtfully.

"Is she a young lady of her word?"

"One never quite knows what Betty and Nancy will do. Betty ran away once when she was about Nancy's age barefoot and ragged, to make her fortune as a singer."

"It would be as well, I think," said the doctor thoughtfully, "just by way of precaution, to send a wire to Betty to tell her to keep a sharp lookout."

"It's three days since she wrote the letter,"

said Dot, "and we can't wire till to-morrow."

"Still, we'll do so to-morrow."

They sat silent for a space, the doctor staring at Nancy's rough letter, Dot's eyes on a fearful-looking print that hung on the wall above the mantelpiece.

"The child seems very fond of you," said Dr. Mark, at last.

"I'm afraid Betty neglects her," said Dot. "Betty is so careless."

"Still, you hardly devote yourself to her," said the doctor drily.

Dot colored, colored vividly.

"But I can't help myself," she said. "Betty can."

The doctor looked at her; his keen eyes seemed to speak.

"Sometimes," faltered Dot, "I think I *ought* to go home."

Still the doctor did not speak, except with his eyes.

"You see, I'm the eldest," said Dot, "and over twenty. And we've no mother."

Silence again. Dot's eyes went back to the print.

"I always did mean to be a help," she said.

"It's clearly a case where there's a gap

waiting for a woman to step into," said the doctor reflectively.

"A woman," said Dot, and her eyes twinkled. It sounded so very odd to be called a "woman."

"Yes," said the doctor, "a womanly woman, who is not bent on shaking the world to get her rights, or writing a book, or painting a picture, or, in short, doing anything but just the old-fashioned woman's work."

Dot's eyes came to his face. She hung eagerly on his words.

"It will be a bad world, Dot, won't it," he said, smiling at her, "when we've no old-fashioned, home-women left?"

"I'm not a woman's right woman," said Dot anxiously.

"The new woman is a wondrous creature," said the Doctor reflectively. "Still, poetry and all sweet things cling to the old."

"I'm not a new woman!" said Dot.

He looked at her, and smiled suddenly.

"My thoughts, Dot," he said, "ran off with my tongue. Of course—and thank Heaven—you're *not* a new woman. But recollect, the new woman doesn't just mean her who rides a hobby horse over every other duty, or has a club and a latch-key. There's the new

woman who has given herself over *holus bolus* to her bonnets and her gowns, her jewelry and pleasures."

"Oh!" gasped Dot, and thought of her list on the dining-room table.

"She's got a gown for every day in the year, Dot, and a hat to match; she wears many rings and many bracelets. The gods she worships are Pleasure and Excitement. I'm afraid you'll say I'm an old, staid man, but save me from your new woman at any cost."

"Oh," said Dot again.

Then the doctor saw her face.

"Ah," he exclaimed, "I've been on the rampage, haven't I? You should have pulled me up—and all because you asked me about Nancy! Do you really think you should go home?"

Dot had thought so—in dream moments.

"Don't you?" she faltered.

"Well," said the doctor, "since you ask me—I *do*. There's a houseful of babies, isn't there, and only bookworm Betty for them all? Betty is the bookworm, isn't she?"

"Yes," said Dot; "but I *believe* she knows more about children than I do."

"And your father must need you."

"But," said Dot, "I should be an extra expense—you forget that."

"Um."

"And there's New Zealand," said Dot, and the tears hung in her eyes.

"So there is," said the doctor.

"Mona would never forgive me—never! never!"

She got up and walked round the room. Then she came back to the doctor's side.

"I must go to New Zealand," she said.

He did not answer.

"I simply must—must," she said, almost crying. "I've been away from home for years and years; will another few months, four at the most, matter? I've *never* been at home like most girls. They can't miss me, because they've never had me." She looked at his face.

"*After* New Zealand," she said, "I'll go home. I'll be eldest daughter, *after* New Zealand—I'll be good *after* New Zealand."

She looked at him again and quickly left the room.

Upstairs she went to her bedroom. Her hands were trembling and her eyes were swimming with tears.

All her placidity, all her sweet serenity, was

gone. It was as if a whirlwind had got into a rosebush and all the pink, soft buds were nodding their petals to the ground.

The doctor was left with Nancy's letter in his hand. He looked from it to the door Dot shut so hastily, and half rose to follow her.

Then he shook his head.

"Poor, pretty child," he said, "we'll see the stuff she's made of. How many of us will be good after our New Zealand! How few without! Heigho, with what tedious homily have I wearied her, and what a rigidly righteous prig a middle-aged man can be! Poor little Dot!"

He left his own writing and the den. These little domestic matters had set him thinking old thoughts again. He decided to try a cigar on the veranda, so he went through the drawing-room and paced up and down the wide, iron-roofed veranda for an hour or more.

Then he recollected time, and thought of bed. All the rest of the house seemed to be asleep, and the duty of turning out the lights had devolved on him. He went to the dining-room, and there was Dot's list, headed "My New Zealand Outfit," upon the table.

He saw the heading and folded up the paper and put it in his pocket.

"I'll give it to her in the morning," he said. "No, I don't think she's strong enough. No: she'll have her New Zealand—and perhaps she'll be good afterwards. It makes a great difference in a woman which comes first—the New Zealand, or the goodness."

After which he turned out the lamp and went to bed.

CHAPTER XIII

DOT'S IDEAL

DOT was in her room alone. On the other side of the wall Mona slept—Mona, who was going to New Zealand. When Dot closed her bedroom door she said tempestuously:

"I *will* go! I will go. How should he know anything about it? Men never do."

And she lighted her candle and drew down her blind and sat on the foot of the bed, leaning her soft chin on the brass rail.

If she had been Betty she would have flung herself out of doors, under the sky, or would have tramped up and down, up and down her room and fought it out with herself.

If she had been Nancy, she would have lain on the floor, and, after committing her sufferings to her diary, have wept torrents of tears.

But she was Dot. And she sat down on the foot of her white bed, and pressed her hands together and cried, not violently, as she talked aloud.

"It was stupid of me—silly, silly to have said I'd go home. I didn't mean it, I never have really meant it. It was deceitful of me, no doubt; but he ought to have known I never meant it."

She took out her handkerchief and rolled it into a ball.

"The Hot Springs," she said, "and Rotorua—and Mt. Wellington—and my new dress—and the voyage! Oh, I couldn't, couldn't give it up. I'll say no more about it."

So she rose, dried her eyes and put her handkerchief away.

Then she bent her thoughts to her list, and tried to consider whether navy blue or dark brown would be the better color for a traveling dress, and which would really suit her better.

But after a very few minutes she was back again on her bed foot, back again, fighting temptation.

Of course, the doctor was right—was he not always? always?

Dot implicitly believed he could not be wrong, could not do wrong. Her reverence for him amounted almost to worship.

She had always striven to win the approval of his eye, but latterly, and with dawning

womanhood, her motive had been higher, her striving intenser.

There had been a time in Dot's life, somewhere about the edges of sweet sixteen, when she was steeped in sentimentalism, that she had given her worship to the cynical, woman-hating man.

She had to worship some one at all times, being Dot. So she sat upon a pedestal the painting-master of her high-class school. He had pathetic eyes and a beautiful nose, an emaciated figure and shapely hands. He was gentle in manner, biting in speech.

Frequently he talked in epigrams, which appealed to Dot. He fitted Dot's pedestal to perfection, and having set him up there, she, of course, and after the manner of sweet sixteen, proceeded to equip him with fanciful characteristics.

He disliked all women bitterly, because of one—or so Dot arranged it. He trusted none.

Between himself and Woman was a Gulf, a great, impassable Gulf.

He turned scornful eyes from even looking upon that other side, merely walking onwards and hurling cynical words about Woman across.

Then Dot took her golden plait and her

short, long gown and her sentimentalism to Mona's home.

And there came into her life, at intervals, the doctor.

His eyes never looked pathetic; they were keen grey, and not, evidently, made for pathos.

His nose was not beautiful, and his face was jovial. His figure was large; in fact, he was a large man altogether, almost burly.

And he didn't despise woman. In fact, he idealized womanhood.

Dot soon found that out; and she began to think he had known some very fair and very good woman, once upon a time—some woman who was broad-minded and sweet-tempered and wholesome-hearted, who loved God, her Bible, her home, her duties, and her pleasures, who could cook and make and mend and sing and play and talk.

It took Dot years to find all these characteristics out, and all the time she was finding them she was striving to be in all ways like this very fair and very good woman of once upon a time.

So that it fell out that the idol of the painter crumbled away on his pedestal like the thing of common clay so many idols are made of.

And in his place was the burly doctor, reverencing his Ideal Woman.

And somewhere below, earnest-eyed and earnest-hearted, was Dot, the Girl, reverencing both—both doctor and Ideal Woman—for in some mystic way they seemed inseparable.

To-night she had seen clearly what that Very Fair Woman would do about New Zealand—she would not go, of course.

Without a quiver or a falter, she would give up. She would go home and take up her duties, and be, in all ways, an earthly angel.

She would know nothing of this ache and bitterness, this terrible insistent Self, who stretched hands for this One Pleasure, this One Good.

She would have no temptation to fight, being so very good; she would, of course, yield at once her own wishes; in fact, she would hardly listen to them.

Dot cried bitterly and far into the night. Even when the doctor had lain an hour asleep, Dot was crying. She was kneeling by her bed then, her face in her hands, and crying.

But by then the worst of the fight was over. She had given up her new dresses, Mt. Wel-

lington, Rotorua, the Hot Springs, the voyage—given each up after a separate fight.

And she was a little nearer to Ideal Womanhood.

But she was so exceedingly sorry for herself that she did not know it. The temptation had been so bitter that she could not compare herself with any one ideal.

She was crying for herself now—for all she had given up.

It was past midnight when she crept into bed; her head ached and she was very tired, but still her sleep was broken and unrestful.

For so far this had been The Great Hour of her life.

In the morning she was pale, and her eyes were heavy lidded. The doctor, having keen eyes, saw this as soon as he saw Dot, but he gave no sign. Otherwise, she was bright and fresh, as usual, and brought her share of chatter to the breakfast table.

(The Ideal Woman never moped or showed her sorrowing, being brave.)

Mona had recovered from her headache, and was making plans for the enjoying of to-day.

"We could drive over to the Peyntons," she said. "It's their tennis afternoon. Ted

Peynton is coming home and bringing two Queensland cousins with him, and lots of others will be there. We can come home by moonlight."

"I'll fetch you," said the doctor, who was touched by a something about Dot. "I'm going into the township, and will call for you."

After breakfast he looked at Dot as she lingered a second in the hall with her hand on the staircase bannister.

"Will you write out the wire?" he asked. "I might as well send it off for you, as I'll be at the Post Office."

"Oh, thank you," said Dot; "someway I'd forgotten all about it."

"Come in here and write it," said the doctor, and he led the way to the den.

Then he reached her a chair and put paper, pen, ink, and blotting paper ready for her.

"Thank you," said Dot, and sat down and wrote out the two addresses easily.

Then she wrinkled up her forehead and began to think.

"It's a very hard wire to write," she said at last. "I can't say, 'Nancy is thinking of running away,' can I?"

"It is difficult," said the doctor. "We

don't want to give Nancy away to the postal authorities, do we? Let me see—'Keep your eye on Nancy.' No, I don't like that, do you?"

"Don't let Nancy out of your sight a moment," suggested Dot.

"That's better," said the doctor; "and add, 'Letter following.'"

"Yes," said Dot and began to write.

"How would it be if I were to look up your people and explain?" asked the doctor. "You know I return to town to-morrow; I'd see them some time the next day."

Dot looked up brightly.

"I shall see them soon," she said; "I've given up New Zealand."

"You've given up—New Zealand!" said the doctor.

"Yes," said Dot.

There was incredulity in the doctor's face.

"Why?" he asked.

"I'm going home," said Dot. Her lips quivered slightly, her face was still pale; when she looked up he saw the tears in her eyes.

The doctor turned away and walked up and down the den.

When he came back to the table, he said:

"Poor little lassie!" so tenderly that the tears began to fall down Dot's cheeks.

"You've *quite* given it up?" he asked.

"Quite," said Dot firmly.

"I don't like it," said the doctor.

"I've done it," said Dot.

"You're sure it is right?"

"Certain."

He walked up and down again. Once more he stopped at the table.

"I didn't think you'd be able to do it, Dot," he said, and his eyes expressed admiration.

"We won't have any unnecessary sacrifice," he went on. "Let us see if there is a way out for you—a way to give you your New Zealand."

"No," said Dot, "I must go home; I should have gone long ago."

"Will you trust me to turn my eagle eye on your home? We'll say nothing about it to anyone; but I'll drop in unexpectedly and see Nancy and the baby, and Betty and them all. And I'll report to you."

"But——" said Dot.

"I don't believe in unnecessary sacrifice any more than in unnecessary pain, Dot, though I believe you think I'd take off a limb for

the pleasure of cutting. Will you trust me to send a fair report?"

"You'll say honestly whether I should go home, whether Nancy exaggerates—whether _____"

"I will—honestly. I'll scrutinize and scrutinize, and scrutinize, and then I'll send my report."

"Yes," said Dot. She looked in some way a brighter Dot again. Perhaps the "hope that springs eternal in the human breast" was even again springing in hers.

"I'll go now," she said, moving to the door.

"There's Mona calling, calling!" She looked over her shoulder—"I wish you could give me a little chloroform until you've paid your visit," she said, smiling wistfully.

CHAPTER XIV

THE DOCTOR'S SCRUTINY

"Thou shalt need all the strength that God can give thee,
Simply to live, my friend, simply to live."

BETTY was twelve days older than upon the night of the burial of her tins under the apple tree.

And the tins were still there, or, in Betty's parlance, she herself was still underground.

Upon the table in her bedroom, where papers, pen and ink had been, was spread a green serge cloth, and two work-baskets stood upon it.

She had filled her days to overflowing with work—household work. She had been rigidly righteous, sternly self-disciplined for many days!

The baby had recovered after two more visits from the doctor and a few more powders. She was now her happy, rosy self again.

Mr. Bruce had gone back to his books and papers, and had apparently forgotten that

Betty had ever put pen to paper except in the letter-writing way.

Nancy was the same cross-grained little creature she had ever been, and Mary, the maid, was rather more trying, slackening her work in proportion as Betty increased hers.

Betty had been a very fair mistress and manager of late.

But ah! the pain and monotony of life—the absolute aridness of it!

She had not even permitted herself to read, or to dream exquisite day-dreams, for many days.

Then alas! she stumbled upon the first oasis in her desert, and it was while walking in the path of duty that she stumbled.

She was dusting her father's study table (it had been very creditable of late), and she happened upon one of the books of the year. A new book.

She gave a little cry of surprised pleasure, and turned over the pages tenderly. How she loved books! new books! books fresh from the author!

In five minutes she was sitting on the floor, her knees up and the book upon them, her chin buried in her hands.

And for two hours she was almost as dead

to the world as though she were in truth with her tins under the apple tree.

She was sought for—but she was not found. She was called—but she did not answer, for she did not hear.

And all things went wrong again, all things household and appertaining to the family's comfort.

Yet Betty did not blame herself, for she had not touched a pen! She tried to right the wrong, patting rough places smooth with hurried fingers, tried to make the surface of things bright as they had been of late.

But alas and alack!

The next day dawned, and she dusted her father's table again—and found thereon another new book.

And before nightfall the fever of Romance was at blood heat in her veins. She was no longer her normal, every-day self. She was in that higher, airier sphere, in which things mundane do not count or matter, and are forgotten entirely.

There was pen and ink upon her father's table and there was paper. And Betty was sitting in the Editor's chair.

It was not Betty, the housekeeper, the children's second mother who, sitting there,

suddenly grasped a pen and let it go roaming over the white paper.

It was Betty, the dreamer, the artist—an entirely different person.

This Betty had glowing eyes, whose vision reached far, far into another world, a throbbing quickly-beating heart, and blood at fever heat.

But oh, the glory of it all—the indescribable bliss!

* * * * *

Dr. Mark alighted from the tram at the corner store, according to Dot's directions.

He was going to the cottage, to scrutinize for Dot.

He passed the school to which Dot, in company with Cyril and Betty, had gone, he passed Captain Carew's big house, and he came to the track through the bush worn by so many Bruce feet.

Before him stood a white wicket gate, and a stretch of wicket fencing. Beyond the gate was an old-fashioned garden, and as the doctor put his hand on the latch there came to him the scent of mignonette and wallflower and stocks and old sweet favorites. For it was essentially an old and an old-fashioned garden.

The doctor lingered, looking at it. He had been into sordid parts of the city that day, and he had seen tiny houses trying to crowd each other into infinitesimal space, putting their elbows into each other, turning their backs on each other.

He had seen misery, poverty, sin and suffering, and it seemed to him now, standing at that wicket gate, in that little corner of the world, that he had reached the abode of peace and sweet-scented flowers.

Climbing roses embowered the veranda; the roof (iron and unkind exceedingly, as Dot averred) in the quiet light, looked just benevolently white and in keeping with the green Nature around.

The doctor opened the gate and walked up the path—still sweet peace and sweet scents.

He walked on a little way, a very little way further, and then all sense of peace fled, for the sound of a baby's crying filled the air.

He ran up the veranda steps—the sound was there!

And he forgot all about sweet peace and sweet scents. The walls of the house stared at him brazenly; they badly needed painting.

He saw *that* now that he was the other side of the roses.

He searched the front door for a knocker or a bell, and finally used his knuckles, finding that the bell did not respond to his appeal.

Then steps came down the hall, many steps, and the door, which was only ajar, was pulled open.

In front of him stood Mary, dirty-aproned, rough-haired, and around her three dirty little children, eating bread and jam.

The doctor inquired for Betty, but Mary, too stupefied for reply, only gazed at him.

It was Joan who ran half-way down the hall and called—

“Betty! Betty!”

And it was Dick who volunteered the information that Betty couldn’t be found anywhere.

Then Mary recovered herself a little, and led the way to the study, recollecting she had started to set the table in the dining-room.

“I dunno where Miss Betty is,” she said. “I’ll call her.”

So the doctor was ushered into the study by Mary, Joan, Dick, and Pepper.

He stood still for a moment, looking for a chair, and then his eyes went to the other

side of the paper-littered table and rested on Betty's dark, bent head.

In a far-away sense Betty was conscious of the opening of the door. Without raising her eyes she came a little way out of her kingdom beautiful, and cried, "Coming!"

Then she ran back again, and her pen made a journey from paper to ink-pot and back again, and then rapidly across the paper.

And Joan said, "Betty," and Dick said, "Betty," and Pepper said, "Betty"—and Betty again said, "Coming," only she snapped it this time angrily.

And her pen was just off to the ink-pot again when she half raised her head and saw the doctor's grey clad legs. Then she looked up sharply in amazement and stared, and drew her hands across her eyes and looked again.

The doctor smiled pleasantly, and stated his name and that he had just come from Dot, and had been commissioned to see how each of them was.

And Betty, ashamed and crimson-faced, put her ink-stained hand into his, asked him to sit down, and tried to frown the jam-eating trio away.

But they were impervious to frowns.

"I'm afraid it's very late for a call, a first one especially," said the doctor, "but I could not come earlier."

"Is it late?" asked Betty. "I mean, yes, of course, it's very late. But"—recollecting her manners—"it doesn't matter."

She was too perturbed, too thoroughly off her balance, for conversation, and the doctor, seeing it, began to talk of Dot.

And Betty hid her inky hand, and the children came further into the room, and Mary was to be heard creaking in the hall near the doorway, and the baby in another room kept up her cry against the injustice of those powerful ones who had arms and did not pick her up.

So five or ten minutes sped away. Then there came to them all the sound of the gate opening and shutting, then brisk steps along the veranda and down the hall.

"Father!" said Betty incredulously.

Mr. Bruce walked into his study, bag in one hand, a packet of books in the other.

"Why are you home so early?" asked Betty. "Is anything the matter?"

Mr. Bruce pulled out his watch.

"A quarter to six," he said; "my usual time."

Then, while the doctor was introducing himself and Mr. Bruce was giving him a warm welcome, Betty slipped away, miserable and worried.

It was too late to offer that almost unknown meal in the house—afternoon tea.

He would have to be asked to their table, have to fare as they fared, and how were they going to fare, any of them?

She looked into the dining-room.

It was the end of the week with the tablecloth, as with them all. A few dying violets drooped weary heads in the four vases; the silver had lost the smile it had worn not quite a week ago; Mary, in her haste, had put on uncleaned knives—she often did; the bread board was dingy, the cruets neglected.

Everything was far too wrong to be set right in a brief space of time.

"What is there to eat?" said Betty in despair, and hurried from the room.

In the hall her father's voice reached her, pleasant as usual, but with a tired note in it.

"Betty, my dear," he cried, "can't you stop baby crying? We can hardly hear each other speak."

"Where's that lazy little wretch of a Nancy?" said Betty aloud stormily; "she's of

no use to anyone under the sun. Nancy! Nancy!"

Betty snatched up the baby and ran to Nancy's room, and there was Nancy, doing precisely what she herself had been doing less than half an hour ago—writing.

"You heard me!" said Betty, "you needn't pretend you didn't. Here, take baby somewhere—out in the paddock, if you like, and get her to sleep."

But Nancy was in a provocative mood.

"Sha'n't," she said.

"Do as I tell you, instantly," said Betty.

"Won't," said Nancy.

The color flamed into Betty's face; her eyes ought to have warned Nancy.

"You'll be sorry for ever if you don't," said Betty.

"I'll be sorrier for ever if I do," said the aggravating child.

The next second Betty had dealt her a sounding smack on one cheek and left the room, not daring to trust herself to stay longer.

She went kitchenwards, jiggling the baby impatiently.

"Mary," she cried, and her eyes were full of trouble, "what have we for dinner?"

"There's cold mutting," said Mary, "but there's precious little on the bone, and I've never had time to peel the potatoes, so there's none. But there's plenty of bread and butter, and I'll do toast."

"Oh!" said Betty, almost weeping, "and no pudding! Oh, for a tin of salmon!"

"We ain't got none," said Mary, "but I could run down to the store."

"Oh, do," said Betty eagerly; "get a tin of salmon and some jam. I'm glad you thought of the store. I'll go on making the tea, and while we have it you can give baby her bottle. Oh, hush—hush—h'sh!"

"Betty!" cried Mr. Bruce's voice in the hall.

"Yes, father?" said distracted Betty.

"Give me a clean towel, my dear."

Betty dashed into her room, and returned with a clean towel.

"And have you some soap? I've only the ghost of a bit."

Betty ran to her room again.

"Betty," cried Dick's voice, raised in sorrow in the hall, "speak to Pepper. I'd just saved my most jamiest bit, and——"

"Be quiet," ordered Betty. "Mary will give you more. Be quiet."

The tea was, in spite of salmon and jam, a sorry meal, a very sorry meal.

Mr. Bruce was hardly conscious of it, because he had a congenial spirit to talk to.

But Betty—Betty who had not had time to get all the ink off her hands, whose cheeks were crimson from worry, whose hair was rough! Poor Betty!

Cyril did not come home—the little boys were in the kitchen.

Mr. Bruce, the mutton bone in front of him, after serving his guest and Betty, looked around him.

"Where is Cyril?" he asked.

"He must be working late," said Betty.

"And Nancy?"

But Betty had no answer.

Mr. Bruce turned to Joan, who was standing beside him.

"Go and find Nancy," he said.

The meal progressed in silence till Joan's return.

"She says she doesn't want any tea," said Joan.

"Dear me—another headache?" asked Mr. Bruce of Betty.

Betty shook her head.

"Is she not well?" persisted her father.

"Just naughty," said Betty, and tried to laugh the subject away.

But the next minute Nancy, like a whirlwind, burst into the room.

"I'm not naughty, Betty Bruce!" she stormed. "You horrid, nasty girl—you know I'm not. I——"

She stopped, aghast, her eyes on the stranger at the table, horrified, amazed.

Her face was pathetically white, her eyes black, black as midnight, and her black hair hung round her in confusion.

"Nancy!" exclaimed her father.

But the next second the child, like a wild elf, had sprung from the room, and gone crying noisily to her bedroom.

So that upon the night of the doctor's scrutiny, all things and almost all people in the Bruce household went wrong.

CHAPTER XV

THE LETTER FROM DOT

It was just four days after Dr. Mark's visit when the letter came.

The post-boy, a friendly youth, seeing Dick digging in his garden, was minded to save his own legs at the expense of Dick's.

"Dick!" he called, and he blew his far-sounding whistle. In a second Dick, Joan and Pepper were racing down to the gate, each wildly anxious to be entrusted with the missive.

"Me—give it to me," panted Pepper.

"Me—'cause you called me," said Dick.

But the boy, who perhaps had a touch of chivalry under his uniform, handed the small envelope to Joan, saying—

"Ladies first;" and the tiny lady, pink with delight, skimmed up the path, calling, "Betty, Betty," as she ran. Betty was mending stockings on the veranda behind the roses. She was a housewife once more; her face was smooth and no ink adorned her fingers.

She had relegated even reading and dreams to Sundays and Sundays alone. Never again were these going to encroach upon serious work-a-day week-days.

Then up came Joan with the letter.

"From Dot," said Betty; "I wonder if she's started for New Zealand yet."

She opened the dainty envelope and dropped her darning into her lap.

"I should say," she remarked, "that Dot is certainly one of those lucky people, born with a silver spoon in her mouth."

"A spoon in her mouth!" echoed Joan. "Right in?"

"Right in," said Betty, "and it's never been taken out, either."

"Oh," said Joan, opening her eyes widely.

Betty began to read. Before she reached the end of the first page an exclamation had broken from her. She read on, amazed, incredulous. She turned back and re-read, more amazed, more incredulous. For Dot proposed to come home, to come home and *work*.

She didn't actually say she was going to work, but she turned a pretty speech about getting into the furrows of the home field and helping to move the plough.

She said she had been looking at life seriously, and she could not help feeling that for years and years she had been shirking her duties.

She hardly referred to New Zealand at all, merely said she had decided not to go. And there were no tears upon the page to tell how they had blistered poor Dot's heart; there were no dashes put in, as in books, to show where the sobs had burst out; there was nothing to tell of the pain of the self-renunciation, or of the bitterness of returning home to the plough.

There was a little preachiness in the letter, certainly. One page in particular was very suggestive of Dot, the elder sister, of Dot at sweet sixteen, with a long, fair plait and serious eyes, showing wayward Betty how to walk aright, giving her texts, and copying out hymns for her.

Betty, always particularly swift to scent and resent the moral in a story, was in arms at once.

"She thinks she's coming to save the heathen," she said; "she's going to teach us how to wash and dress ourselves, and say our prayers. Pooh! We've managed very well so far; let her go to New Zealand!" She tossed

her darning in a heap on the floor, and began to pace up and down the veranda.

Her head was tossed back, the old red glow of smouldering anger was in her eyes. She was that perverse creature, "Betty on the war path," once more.

"I foresee trouble," she said aloud. "I remember Dot of old. She's coming home with her feather duster! She'll be floating about everywhere in a white dress, wanting to reform us—afraid of soiling her hands. Pooh! I know Dot!"

"I won't abdicate," she said sharply, in answer to a thought. "I won't go down a place for Dot. I know how it'll be—'Now, Betty, I'm the eldest; there can only be one captain on every ship, you know—one mistress in every house. Let us do our duty, Betty, and be good.' I know Dot!"

Betty turned into the dining-room.

Flashes of anger were in her eyes now; the fire no longer smouldered—it was ablaze.

She ran to her father's study, seized a piece of paper, pen and ink, and began to write.

How her pen flew!

She thanked Dot for her sweet consideration, but she said she feared they were hardly lost enough to justify them in accepting any-

one so ultra-good as Dot. There were, she said, tribes in India and Africa still further astray. Would it not be better, since Dot was bent on saving some one, to turn her attention to them?

For two pages Betty revelled in biting sarcasm (she loved sarcasm). Then she paused.

"I won't give up—go down," she said; "*won't*. I'll put it to the family. I wonder if Dot really thinks I'm going to knuckle under to her?"

She put it to the childish trio first.

"How would you like Dot to come home and mind you, instead of Betty?" she asked. "Dot to bathe you, and dress you, and tell you what to do?"

But in a second they were round her, clinging to her, climbing upon her knee, twining their arms about her neck, and protesting that they only wanted their own darling Betty.

Her anger was soothed. How could it thrive under the clasp of those loving little arms? She looked at the baby lying on a rug on the veranda, but forebore to question her.

"Fancy Dot managing a baby," she said with fine scorn; "she'd feed it on curry, and expect it to bathe itself."

Later, when preparing the children's tea in the kitchen, she said, as casually as she could:

"Well, Mary, I've had a letter from Miss Dot. She is coming home."

"Eh?" exclaimed Mary, losing her breath and opening her mouth.

Betty repeated herself, adding—

"She is coming to manage the house and look after us all," with only an undertone of bitterness in her voice.

Then Mary smiled, a wide, broad smile.

"It's about time she came," she said.

"Why?" asked Betty serenely.

"Well, look at us all when you get your writing fits on! We all go to ruing."

Betty flushed and paused, knife in hand, to examine the smiling maid.

"Look last week when that gentleman was here," continued the smiling maid. "Look when Nancy cleared out with baby! It's to be 'oped Miss Dot don't write."

Betty went on spreading bread and jam quietly. She could not but perceive the truth in Mary's statements, neither could she resent it.

She felt, too, that the girl would welcome a change of mistresses—indeed, a new jerkiness

had already come into her walk at the mere prospect of Dot coming home.

Betty handed the letter to her father to read at the tea table.

"From Dot!" he said, when the envelope came into his hands; "how suggestive of the child!"

"How?" asked Betty curiously.

Her father turned over the envelope.

"Pretty," he said, "natty. What one might call dainty."

Then he opened the envelope and drew out the letter. Nancy put down her knife and fork. A letter from Dot!

"Is there one for me inside?" she asked breathlessly.

"Eh?—um! What?" cried her father, referring to the letter.

Betty lifted the cosey from the teapot and administered a lavish amount of hot water—or water that had been hot.

"Coming home!" exclaimed Mr. Bruce.

Betty replaced the cosey and said mechanically—"Be quiet, Nancy!"

Cyril had a book propped up in front of him. They were certainly an unsociable family.

"Coming home!" repeated Mr. Bruce, "to stay!"

Nancy dropped her knife and fork, and her queer little face went quite white.

"What did you say, daddie? Who's coming home?" she asked.

"She is really serious in her intentions," said Mr. Bruce, folding up the letter and replacing it in its envelope.

"What do you think?" asked Betty.

"I certainly wish she had consulted us before taking a decisive step," replied her father. "It seems to me that she is standing in her own light, thinking to benefit us. We were doing very well, too."

"Eh?" asked Cyril, looking up.

"Only Dot is coming home to oil our wheels, and set us on our right lines," said Betty, with an uplifting of her head.

"Rather late in the day for her to bother over us," said Cyril.

Nancy gave a little choking cry, and everyone at once looked at her. She was quite pale except for two scarlet spots in her cheeks, and her eyes were brilliant.

"Is Dot really coming home—to *live* here?" she asked.

"Really!" said her father.

Then, to everyone's surprise, the child burst into tears, sobbing hysterically.

She began to talk hysterically of the beauty of Dot, of foundlings, and of the horridness of Betty and Cyril, and then she ran out of the room, and the whole house seemed filled with her sobs.

"What is the matter?" asked Mr. Bruce, bewildered; "is the child frightened of Dot?"

"I think," said Betty laconically, "that she regards her as a bright, particular star, and is simply overcome at the prospect of her falling to our earth."

"There's one thing," said Cyril; "she won't stay long. We're too dull for Dot."

"It will make life pleasanter for Betty," said Mr. Bruce. "Forty pounds a year is a lot to cast away, and I can't help feeling the rashness of it. But the child has a right to come home, and her intentions are the best. Betty at any rate will benefit."

This was such a new view of the case that Betty was silent through sheer surprise.

Dot and she had never been particular friends. To begin with, there was a matter of four years between them. Betty had never crossed that gulf, for, however old she grew to be, Dot was always older.

In childhood's time Dot had always been a little, fair, dainty lady, when Betty had been a distressing tomboy. The one had loved dolls and pretty clothes and playing at house-keeping; the other, climbing trees and fences, chasing the poultry and running about bare-foot.

Then Dot had been a fashionable young lady at school, with half-a-dozen intimate friends; and Betty all the while was a little village maiden, wild and wayward.

And then Dot had gone away to be that mysterious and cultivated being, "a companion," and Betty had come home to be just a "mother's help."

And oh, the wide stretch of country that lay between "companion" and "mother's help."

So that it was perhaps no wonder that Betty had lost sight of the possibility of friendship between herself and Dot. She would almost as soon have thought of bidding Nancy step up to be *fidus Achates* to herself.

But afterwards, when she was alone, new thoughts came, new possibilities unfolded themselves.

It would be a perfectly fair thing, with Dot in the house, to superintend the babies and Mary, for her, Betty, to mount her ladder into

her seventh heaven, and to lose herself there for a few hours every day! Fair and right! They could divide duties, she and Dot, and each have their hours of freedom.

Before she slept that night, Betty had torn up her hostile letter and written a kinder one.

And then she had stood under the apple tree and considered re-opening the grave there—when Dot came home!

CHAPTER XVI

BETTY'S SHIPS

BETTY, the dreamer and idealist, had practical moments—and even days.

She wondered how Dot, knowing the family incubus of poverty, had dared to throw away the power of keeping herself, the pleasure of sending those very occasional gifts to her family.

Then she decided that since Dot had dared, and was coming home, it was high time some other member of the family took herself upon her own shoulders.

And Betty was the only one of an age to have supporting shoulders. Cyril was not even earning his pocket money—boys never began to earn money as early as girls, Betty told herself.

So she gave the situation some hard thinking, and the result was the speedy opening of the apple tree grave days before Dot came home. The operation was performed at mid-

night, by lantern light as before ; but this time, what a different grave-digger !

Her heart was riotous with sweet hopes, her blood was dancing in her veins. She listened for no voice from the star-world, bidding her to cease her digging. She carried her precious tins to the house again, swept cloth and work-baskets and household lists off her table, and set up the precious inkstand in the place of honor.

Two days later she had sent four of her ships a-sailing upon the waters of the world. They were only paper ships, but they carried a tremendous cargo of hope.

The first was a collection of seven short stories, and was despatched to a certain newspaper company in London.

It must not be supposed that Betty wrote the stories then ; she only dived into the recesses of the biscuit tin, brought out the completed and tossed-aside tales, and recopied them.

The second, third, and fourth ships were all alike, but had gone different routes.

They were each chatty letters of Sydney gossip (the news itself culled from magazines and papers), and dressed in Betty's own liter-

ary garment. They purported to come from a gay Sydney girl to her country cousin.

There was a little stage talk in them, a good deal about fashion, a few apt quotations, and some society news.

Betty despatched one letter to a far-away New Zealand magazine and one to a Melbourne paper and one to a Queensland.

The first reply came from Queensland:—

"The editor of the *Mirror* regrets that, having already one lady correspondent in Sydney, he is unable to consider Miss Bruce's letter."

Betty was not cast down. She merely re-addressed the manuscript, and sent it to the *Sydney Weekly Times*.

To do the work, and to do it with her whole heart, as was Betty's way, the family had necessarily been much neglected. Still, Betty's conscience gave her but few pricks this time. She told herself that it was really for their ultimate good.

When the dinners were spoiled and the children and house neglected, when Mary looked tragic, and Mr. Bruce sighed, and Nancy stormed, Betty only smiled as one who, beneath a black cloud, had discerned the silver lining.

She thought of how happy they would all

be when she was contributing, say £100 a year to their comfort.

She decided that then she would engage a housemaid—or, better still, a cook—and would retain Mary more as maid-of-any-and-everything-not-particular.

Then a day of marvelous glory came—a letter that made her hands tremble even at the twentieth reading of it.

The letter said—

“The editor of the *Sydney Weekly Times* presents his compliments to Miss Bruce, and will be pleased to see her to-morrow, Thursday, at 11 a.m.”

That was all; but Betty read between every letter as well as between every line, and she saw wonderful promises written there.

Mary, in her blindness, actually tossed the letter carelessly down upon the table, whereon Betty was making a bread and butter custard, and asked, with never a respectful glance at the envelope, “How much milk will I take? We’ve only got that we’re using.”

But Betty and her letter fled from the kitchen to the bedroom. Who, with a real editor’s letter lying before them, could give thought to the milk supply for the day?

"He's sure to want to see some of my work, as a sort of reference," said Betty to herself in her room. "I must take at least three stories with me."

So she dipped into the biscuit tin again, and again lost herself in the realms of romance.

To-morrow was the day upon which Dot was to arrive. Her boat was due in Sydney somewhere about ten o'clock in the morning, and Mr. Bruce had been to the shipping company and learnt that she would probably be on time.

And Dot would, of course, come straight home, and would arrive at about eleven o'clock.

There was a perverse fate in it; but how could Betty set aside an editor's appointment—for just Dot?

"I will leave everything comfortable for her," said Betty to her conscience. "A dear little afternoon tea sort of meal in father's study. And I'll hurry home again, as hard as I can tear. . . . But it would be madness to break my appointment."

CHAPTER XVII

IN EDITORIAL REALMS

BETTY was on her way to see her first editor—her first *real* editor.

Her father was certainly called an editor, but familiarity with him and with the very beginnings of his magazine had kept him on a different plane in her mind from that on which other editors lived and moved and had their being.

Mr. Bruce had only occupied his dignified post for a few months, and was still, if one may say so, rocking the cradle of his magazine, and rocking it with an anxious heart, moreover.

Previously, and for all the days of her childhood, Betty had known him as a writer *for* editors in that small study of his at home. He had written one book, a clever one, but the world was too busy to give him a hearing. His press articles had earned him a certain amount of local fame, and many of his short stories and poems had appeared in English magazines.

But a few months ago a company of three had launched upon the Australian world—and particularly upon the State of New South Wales—a magazine that they felt would, if not set the Thames on fire, at least illuminate the Southern Hemisphere.

They offered Mr. Bruce the position of editor (on a not too munificent salary), and a fifth share of the profits.

And the dreamy, imaginative heart of the author fastened itself upon the magazine in a strange manner. Coming to him as it did, in the dull, grey days that succeeded the black ones after his wife's death, it was as if new hope and strength had been given to him.

But one could, perhaps, understand why Betty hardly regarded him as an editor in very truth.

She had not even told him of her letter as yet, thinking she would wait till the interview was over, and she had something other than a hope, more or less vague, to talk to him about.

But as she sat by his side in the tram, and glided swiftly over the road that only two years ago they used to traverse in a jolting old coach, she was busy arranging the openings of the interview.

The editor would be middle-aged and sharp-eyed. He would have a bushy, almost ragged, beard; his eyes would look at you from under heavy, overhanging brows; his clothes would plainly display the little thought he gave to them; his coat would be growing green; his linen would not be spotless. For had she not gleaned from her miscellaneous readings that the birth and dwelling place of editors, poets, artists, authors and musicians is—or should be—Bohemia?

He would be brief, even to rudeness. His room would be a medley of books and papers. Every chair would be heaped up.

And she would go into the room and look round for him and see him not; and presently, a gruff voice would make itself heard, and she would look again, and see him there behind all that medley of papers and books on a table. And——

“Come, Betty, my dear,” said her father.

Betty started. The tram had stopped, and a stream of people was hurrying from it and neighboring trams to the boat. Her father was standing on the road ready to help her out.

“How stupid of me!” she said, hurrying along by his side; “I wasn’t noticing!”

They sat together on the deck of the steamer, and their eyes went over the reach of blue waters that came laughing in from The Heads.

Such a soft, summer morning, such sweet blue of sky and sea! Just a taste of both they had, all these hurrying workers, just a few deep breaths of soft sea breeze, before walls shut them in and the long hours of their toil began.

"I am really sorry you could not have arranged your trip for to-morrow," said Mr. Bruce. "I am afraid Dot will think you very unkind."

"She won't when I tell her why," said Betty, repeating the only thing approaching an excuse she had been able to think of since her father had expressed his surprise and sorrow that she should be away for Dot's arrival.

"I've left everything comfortable for her," said Betty. "I printed 'Welcome' in large letters and pinned it up in her bedroom, and I kept Nancy at home, though she was away from school on Monday with toothache; and I left a letter for Dot, explaining that I simply had to go."

Mr. Bruce absently unfolded a small roll of papers, and his eyes ran down a page or two.

And Betty unfolded a paper in her hand,

and began to read, too. It was one of her stories for her editor. Mr. Bruce's was one from a contributor.

They made a grave, business-like-looking couple—the grey garmented, sad-faced man and the white-gowned girl.

Then the boat came in to the quay, and there was a rush over the gangways, along the wharf and through the turnstiles.

"I'll leave you now, Betty," said her father, on the quay. "I see a man I want to speak to. Have you enough money for your shopping?"

"Oh, plenty," said Betty, as his hand went to his pocket, "all I want, truly. Good-bye, daddie."

"Good-bye, my dear."

He went hurrying away to catch up with his friend, and Betty stood alone.

The Custom's House clock pointed to a quarter to ten, and the editor's letter said eleven o'clock.

"I'll have half an hour in a book shop," said Betty to herself, "then I'll do my bit of shopping; and then, if there's any time to spare, I'll go to the library."

So she hurried through the busy streets to a large book arcade, and she wandered round and round the counters. Oh, the books!

Stacks and stacks of them! Beloved authors, all in pigeon hole neatness, lining the walls; tables given over to poets in soft leather covers; libraries in sage green and æsthetic blue.

Time passed. It *seemed* brief, and Betty closed "Lewis Morris" and came a little way into to-day.

"I must find a clock," she said. But instead she found a stairway leading to the second-hand department, and she mounted it very quickly, and was once more as one dead to the world.

And time passed, and again it seemed brief; and Betty, lost in her book, heard the Post Office clock striking. She only counted seven, because she was not quite aware when it began.

"I wonder what time it is," she said, and was just returning to her book when she saw a young man at a desk, observing her with a half smile. She went to him and asked him the time, carrying her volume with her.

"Eleven o'clock," he said.

"*Eleven o'clock!*" said Betty incredulously.

"Are you *sure?*"

"Sure," he said, "it's just struck."

"It was only a quarter to ten——" said

Betty, and she put down her book and hurriedly left the room. She hastened along the streets, round this corner, down that street, through this arcade.

Of course, it would prejudice the editor forever against her if she were late.

At last she reached the door of the newspaper building. Outside were placards, pages cut from the magazine, whole newspapers.

Only when she stood at the counter and asked for the editor did her heart by its quickened beatings tell her she was in the wonderful precincts of journalism at last.

"Upstairs, down first passage—second door to your right," said a clerk.

And Betty went upstairs.

In the long passage, before the "second door to her right," she waited to let her heart regain its quieter pace. Her eyes were on that dark shut door, her hands absolutely refused to knock.

She walked down the passage again, back to the stairway head, and for a dismal minute or two glared down on the heads of the pen-driving clerks. Then back to the door, to stand stock-still before it, too faint-hearted to even tap.

There was a step on the inside, the handle turned, and a man carrying a Panama hat faced Betty. They were both startled.

"Er——" he said, "I beg your pardon."

"The—editor," faltered Betty, in almost a whisper.

"Come in. Come in."

She went in timidly. By nature she was neither timid nor shy, but it must be remembered she held both editors and their precincts in the utmost veneration.

Her face was quite white. Her eyes went past this youngish-looking man to the table, which was not abnormally untidy. One did not, for instance, have to crane one's neck to see if some one was tossing manuscripts into the waste-paper basket that stood beside the chair.

"Won't you sit down?" said the man, taking a parcel off a chair.

"Can I see the editor of the *Sydney Times*?" asked Betty, not noticing the chair.

"I am the editor," said the man, and he returned to his seat and placed his hat upon his table.

"You!" said Betty, and her eyes spoke the plainest astonishment.

For this man was carefully clad from his

Panama hat and spotless linen to his shining boots. His eyes were smiling—and kind, one might certainly say. No ragged beard—a small, dark, well-trimmed one. And but a light burden of years apparently adorned his shoulders.

“Even I!” he said smiling.

“Oh!” said Betty. “I am—Elizabeth Bruce.” She added, recovering herself, “You—you asked me to call.”

“Oh,—ah!—yes.”

His eyes noted the packet in her hand, and he smiled again, for, though his years might not be very numerous, his experience was large.

“About that letter,” he said jerkily, “it was very good. You did it yourself?”

“Yes,” said Betty anxiously.

“Ah! Well, it was very good; in fact, the identical thing we want. Now, could you manage a similar thing once a week?”

Betty’s heart thumped, stopped—and began to gallop.

“Yes,” her lips said.

“I’ll tell you about how many columns after and such like particulars. Can you correct proofs?”

Betty had frequently assisted her father in

this duty, so she was able to answer at once with a ready affirmative.

"That's good. Have you done any other writing of this sort?"

"No," said Betty; "I only just thought of it."

"I see. Well, the lady who has been doing this work for us never was quite able to grasp the importance of punctuality. The copy must be in our hands ready for press no later than 5 p.m. every Wednesday. Can you manage that?"

"Oh, easily," said Betty.

"The letter should run to about a column and a half or two columns. Be newsy. Light in touch. In fact, you've just hit what we want in that sample letter. Now, the *Sydney Times* doesn't pay for this sort of thing too generously. I dare say you came expecting a big salary to be offered to you. We're only prepared to pay four pounds a month."

Betty's face flushed and grew very bright.

"Oh, that will do splendidly," she said; for indeed it seemed a very large sum of money to her.

"You shouldn't say that," said the editor, smiling; "you should 'hum' and 'ha' a bit, and sit in glum consideration for five minutes or

so, and then accept it hesitatingly. Now, I hope to goodness you live in town or in a civilised suburb."

The first doubt darkened Betty's face.

"You can't possibly manage it if you don't," said the editor. "Many of the functions you must attend. Where do you live?"

"North Sydney," said Betty—and did not add, "in the scrub and silent places."

"Um. Over the water. It could have been better. Well—look in on Monday week. Our present lady will finish up her month."

Soon after Betty took her departure, well aware an editor's time is too precious to be trifled with.

"I belong to this office now," she told herself, as she went downstairs; "I am a member of the staff."

Her heart was full of kindness to every scribbling clerk. She could have danced down the steps into the street, danced down the streets to the boat, such a sense of joy possessed her.

Four pounds a month!

"Twelve fours—forty-eight," she said—"forty-eight pounds is *too* glorious. I *must* be dreaming."

CHAPTER XVIII.

COMING HOME

DR. MARK PARBURY met Dot at the Sussex Street Wharf.

Away in the city the clock was striking nine as the boat came in.

Dot had had three nights and two days at sea. She had not been ill; she was quite an experienced sailor on these short coasting trips.

She had breakfasted, hat and gloves were on, her dress basket was strapped and standing on deck, and the rest of her luggage was directed for a carrier to call for. And there she stood, a trim natty little figure, in a holland coat and skirt and Panama hat, fresh as the morning, sweet as the fairest flower it had to show.

The doctor's eyes brightened as soon as he saw her, and a conviction was instantly born in him that he had done very right in advising her to come home, though he had had doubting intervals ever since. Surely such a trim little person, such an eminently

womanly little woman must bring sunshine and peace to any home in the world!

"Where's the luggage?" he asked, after they had exchanged greetings.

"To be called for," said Dot. "I'm all ready to step ashore."

"Come along," said the doctor; "I've a cab waiting to take you to the quay. This your basket? No; this? All right. Come along."

Dot's heart had warmed at first sight of her hero's face, even though a chill had come, too, in that no member of her own family was there to meet her.

"I volunteered to meet you," said the doctor, as they went driving up the hill into the city. "You see, having advised you to come, I felt responsible for your safe delivery."

Dot was soon chattering away happily. She had so much to tell him about the North Country home, his father, Mona, the New Zealand trip, that they were on the punt, crossing the harbor in their cab, before Dot fully realized they had left the North Coast boat.

"I feel," she said laughing, "as if I'm a hospital nurse and you the doctor, taking me to my first case. How far are you coming—all the way?"

"Just over the water," said the doctor. "I

tried to arrange things to go further with you, but a disobliging patient requires me before eleven o'clock."

"We get out here," said Dot, as the cab left the punt; "we take a tram. That's wonderful civilization, for we always used to take a coach."

"To-day," said the doctor, "you keep your seat. The cab is going to take you all the way."

He smiled at her evident pleasure.

She had half an hour's pleasant drive after the doctor left her. Her thoughts leaped forward to imagine them at home. The house would be spruced up in honor of her; Betty would not be inky; Nancy would not be stormy; Mary would not be untidy.

The surface of things would be seemly.

And she was not going to look under the surface—for a day or two. She felt, intuitively, Betty, the housewife, would resent that.

But afterwards—some evening when silence reigned, and the children slumbered—she and Betty would have a long and sisterly talk. Dot, for her dignity's sake and for the good of the family, must take up her position, as eldest, *firmly* and kindly. She must be (after her father, of course) head of the house, mis-

tress. They would divide duties, she and Betty; both pleasant and unpleasant—divide children.

"I shall take Nancy," said Dot, nodding out of the window to the blue, smiling world. "Someway she seems to be more mine than anyone's. Betty can have Joan. I'll take Dick; and she can have Pepper and the baby. We'll each be responsible for their clothes, health and morals."

They were in the red road land now, drawing nearer and nearer to home.

"I'll take father," said Dot, as they came round by the little store, "Betty can have Cyril, as he's her twin; I really know very little about Cyril—There's the white gate; how well I remember it!" Poor Dot! The tears rushed to her eyes and her heart trembled.

The last time she had seen that white gate, her mother had been leaning over it, waving farewell, watching with loving eyes her eldest daughter so long as there was the least bit of her visible upon the road.

The gate was not built to admit such luxuries as cabs, so Dot was forced to alight on the outside, and the cabman carried her basket to the veranda.

And the second chill came to her heart.

Never before had she come home that she had not been watched and waited for, and oh, so warmly welcomed!

No one was looking for her to-day. The veranda, littered with toys, was deserted, the hall door stood open, and silence reigned.

The tears were very near to Dot's eyes when she walked into the hall. She reached the part where it branched kitchenwards and bedroomwards, and she cried, "Betty!"

From the kitchen came Mary, amazed, wide-eyed, and very untidy.

"Good lor', Miss Dot!" she said, and stood there gaping.

"Well, Mary," said Dot, trying to smile, "you look as if I'm a surprise party."

"Miss Betty said you wouldn't be here till eleven," said Mary.

"And it's very nearly that. Where is Miss Betty—in her room?"

The dining-room door opened, and out came a tiny maid in a navy blue overall.

"Miss Betty's gone to town," said Mary, advancing; "but she's left a note for you, in front of the clock on the dining-room mantel-piece."

"Joan!" said Dot, and her voice broke a little.

She held out her arms to her golden-haired sister, and Joan crept into them and timidly kissed this very grown-up and fashionable-looking young lady.

Another door creaked, away among the bedrooms, and Nancy's face, white and startled, peered into the passage.

She had been working so hard—and had still so much to do!

Fresh flowers were in the dining-room, bunches of fern were stuck behind the pictures, as was done at Christmas, when all their hearts were gay.

Ferns and wild flowers decorated one chair—for Dot. Ferns and wild flowers decorated one bed-foot—for Dot.

And it was all Nancy's work.

For the last hour the child had been dressing, tremblingly, anxious to look well for this beautiful strange sister. Her wardrobe numbered few and no pretty dresses. She tried on a pale blue muslin, faded and old, and it made her look so sickly and yellow, and was withal such a sorry garment that she dragged it off again.

She twisted her limp, black hair, and tried to curl it as she had seen Betty do Joan's—by wetting a comb and turning damp strands

round her finger. But poor Nancy's hair only hung limper and uglier.

At last she was dressed, though by no means to her own satisfaction. Her hair was swept back from her face and tightly plaited, as for school. Her frock was next week's clean school one—lilac and ugly. But she had fastened a bright, lemon-colored bow of ribbon (a doll's soiled sash) at her neck, and felt happier.

Then there came certain unusual sounds in the hall, and she opened her door half an inch.

Dot's back was visible to her, a trim, well-shaped back. She had a glimpse of golden hair under a Panama hat as Dot stooped over Joan, and her heart thumped till she clung to the door for support.

She was come then—beautiful Dot! She was here, here in the house, in the hall! Mary was speaking to her—Joan was kissing her.

From the dining-room came two little boys, both in ugly overall costume, Mary not having dressed them according to Betty's orders. But they both went willingly into their elder sister's embrace and gave her back kiss for kiss.

Then Dot called—"Nancy! Where's my little Nancy?"

Nancy, in the doorway, gasped, and her queer little face whitened.

She drew back, and like a hunted animal looked round her room.

"She was in her bedroom," said Joan, leading the way.

Dot followed calling—"Nancy! Nancy!"

Nancy gave a little choking sob. Now that the supreme moment had come she simply could not meet her idol.

She sprang to the bed and crawled under it, trembling in every limb.

"She *was* here!" said Joan, in the doorway.

"I wonder where she is!" said Dot. "I must wait, I suppose. Where is Betty's letter?"

"In front of the clock," said Mary who had, of course, followed, and, of course, forgotten Betty's orders to carry in tea as soon as Dot arrived.

But even the letter did not throw much light on the dark face of things, nor take away the chilliness of the greeting.

Betty said she was very sorry to be away, but she would hurry back again and explain all when she saw Dot.

So Dot sat down for a space in the dining-room, just as if she had been a stranger; and

she talked to the three tiny people, and tried hard, oh, so hard, not to think unkindly of the family that had failed to welcome her, when she had given up so much for their sakes.

And even the surface of things was not spruced up, as she had expected it to be. The table-cloth was draped over four chairs—Joan had been making a tent—and a bare, scratched table-top met one's eyes.

The little boys had their rows of books upon the floor—their trains, as they speedily explained to Dot. Mary had left three porridge plates upon the piano; Mr. Bruce's slippers were still beside the chair he had occupied at breakfast.

And Dot was a neat little person. She simply loved order—a place for things, and things in their place; tidy, clean children; spruce, white-capped maids.

"My train had an accident this morning," said Dick shyly.

"Did it," said Dot; "however was that?"

"The boiler burst, and all the passengers were killed," said Dick.

"My boiler burst, too," said Pepper.

"How dreadful!" said Dot.

Her eyes went to the curtainless windows, the cushionless sofas and chairs; then to the

walls. Only five pictures were there—all old-fashioned, cheap prints, in fly-spotted, gilt frames. So ugly!

And Dot was artistic, as well as tidy.

She had not been home for two years, and she had forgotten. Her memory, when it had been called upon to show her home precincts, had been kind.

Poor Dot gulped down a sob of disappointment and rose to leave the room, just as quick, light steps came down the hall—and Betty stood before her.

The two sisters looked at each other for a long minute. Betty, without recognizing how or why, saw that Dot was well and fashionably dressed.

But Dot, quick-eyed, saw every detail in poor Betty's costume and face.

The brown, thin, eager face, with its dark dips of hair on the low forehead, its hair done simply and with no more regard to the day's demands that might have been paid by a desert dweller.

Her hat was a straw, with a broad, black band round it, named a sailor. And it had a high crown, and no one wore high crowns now!

Her dress was a coarse, white muslin, clean

and nicely ironed, but the sleeves were two years old, and the skirt could hardly be dated.

Poor Betty!—and yet all unconscious that she was so.

Her face was radiant; her smile particularly bright. She kissed Dot warmly.

"I was *so* sorry to be away," she said, "but you've only just come, haven't you? I see even your gloves are on. You must have just been before me on the road all the way. You caught the eighteen past eleven, didn't you?"

"I came in a cab," said Dot.

"A cab!" said Betty in surprise, for she had considered walking a section to save twopence. "Well, never mind how you came," she added, "you're *here*. That's the main thing. Now come to father's study and have some tea."

Her eyes fell on the untidy room, on the unwashed children, and she felt sore against Mary for her broken promises.

The study at least was tidy and as she had left it, and on the table stood the tea-tray—the "kind of afternoon tea meal"—she had prepared before leaving.

"I don't care much about tea," said Dot. "To tell the truth, I don't think I could drink it. I only take it in the afternoon."

"Oh," said Betty, "afternoon tea?"

"Yes."

"A meal we ignore. You must want a drink. It's so hot."

"Just lemon syrup, or soda water, thank you," said Dot.

Betty flushed.

"We've neither," she said.

"Then *water*," said Dot laughing. "I've a good recipe for lemon syrup—we'll soon have some."

"I've a recipe, too," said Betty. "Come and take off your things."

In the bedroom was the green bowered bed—the bed Dot had slept in as a child. She looked at it, and her eyes filled, for the ferns and greenery were the first attempts at a welcome she had noticed.

"Who did it?" she asked.

"Nancy—I suppose," said Betty drily. "She always leaves undone the necessary thing to do the unnecessary."

Nancy lying under the bed, flushed hotly. Was Betty going then to set her idol against her?

"I gave you this room," said Betty. "I thought if we took a room each, and so many children each——"

"Just what *I* thought," said Dot eagerly,

"and I don't want to be greedy, but I would *love* to have Nancy."

Nancy's heart danced. Somebody in the world would "love" to have her. Sudden tears smarted in her eyes.

"I was going to ask you to," said Betty. "Perhaps you'd have some influence with her—I've none."

"I'm longing to see her," said Dot. "Where is she?" Betty laughed.

"I gave her a holiday in honor of you," she said, "so I suppose she's gone to school."

Dot laid down her hat and gloves and coat on the bed, just as if she were a visitor who would don them again in a few short hours.

"Is she self-willed?" she asked.

Betty shrugged her shoulders.

"I'll leave you to find out," she said.

But the next second Dot had leaped in the air, for Nancy had suddenly clasped her feet in a burst of misery.

"I'm not—I'm not—I'm not!" she cried shrilly. "Don't listen to her, dear, darling Dot!"

"Come out!" ordered Betty sharply.

But Nancy only went on screaming.

"Come out, Nancy," said Dot and stooped to raise the counterpane.

And the poor little child came out. Her face was all the uglier for her anger and the crying; her hair was tightly drawn back; her dress was soiled, for alas, there was fluff and dust *under* the white bed.

There must have been some motherliness in Dot's heart. Perhaps the doctor's last estimate of her was correct, after all.

She saw nothing of the untidiness and plainness of the little sister before her. She sat down on the bedside, opened her arms, and gathered Nancy close to her.

"Poor little girl," she said. "Poor little Nancy!"

Nancy sobbed like a weary child—tired hiccoughs of sobs.

"I'm—I'm *not* self-willed!" she said.

"Of course not," said Dot.

"I'm—I'm not ugly."

"Of course not, dear."

"Oh! I'm so glad you've come. I'm so glad you've come!"

Betty left the room, her dark head in the air and a scornful smile on her lips.

"She'll soon find out," she said; "I'll give three days—no more. I wonder if Mary has remembered the pudding. Oh, dear, I must see to baby's food."

CHAPTER XIX

BETTY'S SCHEME

THE next evening Betty opened her father's study door and peeped in.

Her face was all aglow, as surely it had never been before, and her heart was beating, beating till it seemed to set her throat throbbing.

For Betty had a "scheme"—a scheme which had kept her awake half through the previous night, and made her by turns distraught and gay in the day, to Dot's bewilderment.

At the sound of the opening of the door, Mr. Bruce raised his head and gazed unseeingly at the girl's face. His brain was just beginning to warm and quicken with new thoughts, and a sheet of ink-wet paper was before him.

"*Should I interrupt?*" asked Betty wheedlingly.

"Eh?" said her father.

"*Could your worship grant me ten minutes?*"

She came into the room and shut the door.

"No more, then," said her father; "and I'd rather have given you them at any time during the day. Well?" He lifted his eyes from his sprawling black scrawl, and saw her face.

"What is the matter?" he asked in surprise; for the shining light in the girl's face was wonderful—her glowing eyes, her tremulous mouth.

"I—I've got a scheme, daddie," she said and she didn't sit down. She just began to walk up and down the small room.

"If you throw cold water on it," she said, "you'll kill me. Oh, father, there's no cold water in the world, so don't *look* for any, I've used it all up during the seventeen years of my refrigerated life."

"Poor little icicle," said her father humoringly.

"I want to go away from home," she said feverishly—"right away by myself. I want to live in an attic up ten flights of stairs, where I can see nothing but chimney tops and sky by day and stars at night. Now Dot is here——"

A sudden thought came to her father.

"Surely not a quarrel the first day!" he said.

Betty laughed.

"I should think not," she said; "we're far too polite! We're keeping the first quarrel for the fifth day. No, if Dot had not come home I was going to slaughter my Pegasus and become a model Martha; I was going to 'make and mend,' and do all the housewifery 'that best becomes a woman.' But oh, I *hate* it so—I *hate* it so! And I love my Pegasus."

"But, child, you can keep him at home, in your room."

"And never rise on him. Never!" said the girl hotly. "It's Betty, Betty, all day long. There's no peace." She clasped her hands and faced her father.

"My life is one long study in interruptions," she said, and her eyes filled. "I'd rather have a limb or two off and have done with it," she said, speaking as one who had several to spare; "but the hourly sawing away at my thoughts, it's—it's positive agony."

No one could doubt her. Her mobile face was working, her eyes shining with tears. She was suffering the agony even while she spoke.

Her father threw down his pen. He perhaps, better than anyone in the world, could understand her.

He, too, had yearned for an attic up ten flights of stairs, with only the chimney tops

and the star-world for company. And he had been given eight noisy children and a weather-board cottage! His present office in town was the nearest approach to the attic and the ideal he had yet attained.

"I know," he said, "I know. But how on earth—can—it be—done? I don't want to blot out your start, my child—but how can it be done? We must be practical, Betty."

He tried to look so; threw back his head and bent shoulders, and frowned. But of the two of them, Betty, though more of an enthusiast because younger, was far more practical.

"Quite easily," she said cheerfully. "Of course, I know for one thing, it wants money."

She then told her father of her visit to the *Times* editor, and of her engagement as letter writer.

Mr. Bruce was as astonished as she could possibly have desired, and the salary was, in his eyes as well as in Betty's, munificent.

"Forty-eight—practically fifty pounds a year," he said.

"Yes," said Betty eagerly, "and that's only *one* letter a week. I *might* be taken on by New Zealand or Melbourne. I shall try all the colonies. I could *easily* manage three let-

ters a week—and *then* get time for my stories. In an attic all things are possible."

Her father smiled.

"To the young," he said, "all things are possible. Life looks just a golden stairway, Betty, to the highest heaven of all. And, I suppose, my child, it *is*—or may be. We who've missed our footing blame the stairway and even doubt the Heaven."

He stared before him with sad eyes. How he, too, had longed to climb! How eager-hearted, warm-blooded he had been! And now—now——

"The desire of the moth for the star!" he murmured.

Some of the glow, a very little, faded from the girl's bright face. Her father noticed it at once.

"Go on, my child," he said, rousing himself. "Climb, and climb—higher and higher. I know what you want—you want your struggle. I won't stand in the way of your ten-story high attic. I'll make you a settled allowance. That's how a practical father should talk, isn't it?"

"Not a penny," said Betty firmly. "It would spoil everything. Father—I *am* practical—I've been into this over and over. I

intend to be a self-supporting young woman. If I come to grief (and no fear of *that*), I can come to you *then* for an allowance. Let me have my flutter, anyway."

"Well, let me pay rent."

"Not a penny," reiterated Betty, "not a fraction of a penny!"

"Let me pay the——"

"Nobody and nothing," said the girl firmly.

Her father considered, then a new thought came.

"My dear," he said, "is it—is it what the world calls *proper*? No, I'm sure it's not."

"Pooh!" said Betty scornfully, "what do I care for the world?"

"But we *must* consider it. Look at the thing, my child. You're seventeen, aren't you? Now, can I let you face the world at seventeen, *alone*? Chaperons, my child, though highly unpleasant shadows, are highly necessary——"

"Suppose," said Betty thoughtfully, "that I got my attic in some old lady's house. There are loads of old ladies——"

"With attics to let?"

"Yes," said Betty stoutly, "loads. Loads who would be glad to let a room for a trifle a week—an unfurnished room. And if she's

a lonely widow lady, or a dear little old maid, think how she would like to go to the 'functions' with me! Why, it would open up life for her. I'll put an advertisement in the paper, father, and I promise you, if you don't approve of the old lady and the attic, I'll—not give up—but I'll try till you do."

"Very well," said Mr. Bruce, smiling, "We'll leave things like that. But again——"

"No more cold water!" said Betty.

"No; it's lukewarm—how about Dot? Is she able to do at once what you have been doing for years?"

"I really think she's very good," said Betty; "she's so tidy, and she's a book full of recipes, and one of the completest work-baskets I ever saw."

"Still——" said Mr. Bruce.

"And she can carve poultry," said Betty; "she's taken lessons in it."

"But we rarely have poultry."

"Oh, I know. But it's a *sign*, isn't it? She *sounds* so capable. She has a lot of 'Hints on Sick Nursing'——"

"But we are seldom ill."

"I *know*. But if you are? I'm only showing you that taking her all round she is far more capable than I. *I* only know a few

childish ailments: sore throat, toothache, ear-ache, and so on. And when I carve a fowl I start at one end of the table, and before I've half done, I've traveled all round—I and the fowl and the dish. And my work-basket is always half full of children's treasures. Oh, I'm sure Dot is far better than I."

"For every-day life, and a rough girl like Mary?"

"Oh, yes. Dot knows the duties of all servants: butlers, cooks, under-housemaids, nursery-housemaids——"

Mr. Bruce's eyes twinkled.

"Then she can manage our staff," he said.

Betty laughed.

"I'm only showing you," she said again, "how *much* better she is than I am. Now I *couldn't* set one of those servants their duties if my very life depended on it."

"Suppose you and Dot talk over *pros* and *cons*," suggested Mr. Bruce. "Hear what she has to say. We must consider her. Remember, she has come home out of consideration to us, has given up, I suspect, a very comfortable home, to make us happier. You must consult Dot."

"I'll go *now*, this instant," said Betty. "You're quite right, father, I *should* tell Dot.

Have I taken up *very* much of your time?
I believe I've been here hours."

Mr. Bruce gave a whimsical look at his blackly written page.

"I was really in good vein," he said; "now I'm all attics and old ladies. Betty, do you know this:

"Making a mock of life and all its cares—
Rich in the glory of my rising sun,
Lightly I vaulted up four pair of stairs,
In the brave days when I was twenty-one.
Yes; 'tis a garret—let him know it who will.
There was my bed, full hard it was and small;
My table there—and I decipher still
Half a lame couplet charcoaled on the wall."

Well, never mind the rest. It's a cry of one old and weary, who has done precisely what you would do—Go to. Go to. And shut the door."

Betty found Dot in the dining-room, sitting idly in front of the piano, her hands sunk on the keys, just as she had struck her last chord.

The children were all in bed. Cyril had disappeared with his books to his bedroom. Mr. Bruce was in his study, and Betty she had lost sight of.

Last night Dot had been treated as a visitor.

She had been talked to, listened to. She had played and sung, and the family circle had drawn together. But to-night they had all gone their own ways without her.

Even Nancy, her worshipper, had crept to bed, almost blinded with one of her headaches.

There was a little weariness at Dot's heart. Until to-day a sort of exaltation had buoyed her up. Perhaps she felt something of a heroine; perhaps she felt she was coming to be a household angel.

And now—now where was she?

Where was there room for her in all the weather-board cottage precincts? Who wanted her? Who was there to belong to?

Not her father certainly. He seemed to actually require no one—unless it was Betty!

Not Cyril. He gave her scant attention, and turned to Betty in all things!

Not Betty! That strange, eager-eyed sister who seemed to walk with her head in cloud-land, and——

"Dot," said Betty in the doorway, "is that 'The Lost Chord,' or 'A Song without Words,' or——"

"I wasn't thinking," said Dot, raising her hands from the keys and leaving the piano.

"If you're not going to do anything particu-

lar," said Betty, "let us have a little talk. I have something I would like to consult you over."

Dot's face brightened.

"Certainly," she said, and looked expectant.

Doubt darkened Betty's mind. What if Dot should say, "No, I couldn't undertake it. I'll pack up and go back to Mona, and peace and plenty."

"I hardly know how to begin," said Betty diffidently, "but the truth is, I want to do something similar to what you have been doing. I want to go out into the wilderness, and keep myself."

Dot's eyes opened widely.

"A companion?" she asked.

"No," said Betty, "a scribe. Something of an author and something of a journalist. But till I'm out of the grub-like state call me a scribe."

"A scribe!" repeated Dot, as one dazed.

"A scribe," said Betty, "is one who wields a pen. I *never* could get a chance to wield mine. Now I've got it, and—and it rests with you whether I take it or not."

"With me?" said Dot.

"Yes. You're new to it all—to the house and the children and Mary. Would it be

dreadful if I went away and left all on your shoulders?"

"I was *going* to suggest a division of work," said Dot.

"And now——Oh, Dot, it would be too much for you, wouldn't it? It *is* a lot. But we might find a way to lessen it; a young girl to come daily and mind the children, for instance."

Something of a smile came to Dot's face.

Perhaps she was a little pleased, just a little, at the prospect of being Queen of the Kingdom of Home. She always had been a trifle afraid of Betty and although these two days she had rigidly kept to her plan of only regarding the surface of things, she had *seen* beneath it, for how could she help it? And she had been longing for, say, the fourth or fifth day, when she might say:

"Let us make an arrangement, Betty, as to the work and the children. There are *so* many things I want to see altered, that *must* be altered. But don't let us quarrel!"

Yet some subtle sense had warned her that Betty was not an easy young person to dethrone. She would not meekly step down to a lower seat, if she felt the higher one was hers by right.

And she had recollections of Betty's eyes flashing, of Betty's lips curling, of Betty's feet stamping!

"If," said Dot, "if you have been able to manage, Betty, I really think I can. You see, I'm really so *much* older!"

"Only four years," said Betty.

"I have had *eight* years more experience of life," sighed Dot, as one who had been over the rocks of the world and cut her feet.

"*Pleasant* experience," corrected Betty.

"I've *seen* how homes are managed," said Dot. "I've seen what you call the wheels within the wheels."

Betty felt she was being mulcted of something.

"There's such a difference," she said, "between merely looking on, and making the wheels go round."

A little stiffness got into Dot's voice.

"Still," she said, "it is *possible* I can manage."

"It's possible," said Betty doubtfully.

Dot laughed. She saw, for some reason, things were going wrong, and she made an effort to smooth them over.

"Do you want my credentials—my references?" she asked. "I am a fair cook, I can

make soups and jellies, puddings and cakes, and *entrees*. I can sew and darn, do plain and fancy needlework; I——”

“You know as much of children as the heathen know of you, I expect,” said Betty.

“Ah!” said Dot airily; “but I have in my trunk a book, and it’s entitled, ‘The Care and Management of Children, from their tenderest Day,’ which will include even baby.”

“Um,” said Betty. But her eyes certainly admired her elder sister almost frankly. “Are you sure you can learn—from a book?”

“It’s how I learnt drawn-thread work and netting,” said Dot. “You can learn *anything* from a book if you only get the right book.”

“I give in,” said Betty, with a sudden laugh. “I didn’t expect you to know so much! I thought you’d be a fashionable young lady, who would only be able to drink afternoon tea and play tennis. In all probability, this household will live to bless the day when Betty turned Scribe, and Dot Head of the House.”

CHAPTER XX

"UP FOUR PAIRS OF STAIRS"

BETTY'S advertisement appeared in the two morning papers, and brought a host of replies. She advertised for an unfurnished room in the home of a married or an elderly lady—must be quiet and central.

And an exhilarating number of elderly ladies replied that they had unfurnished rooms to let, and would be pleased to show them to "Scribe" if she would call.

Betty sorted out half-a-dozen that she considered likely ones, and went with an eagerly beating heart to view the rooms.

In the first instance there was a baby, and it was crying lustily, so Betty, with a lively recollection of the murdering of supreme moments by the cry of a child, refused. At the second place she was offered a front room off the street—she who longed for an attic; and at the third place the neighborhood was noisy and unpleasing.

The fourth was central. It was in one of

Sydney's main streets, and faced a park. A high, three-storey house, in a long terrace of high, three-storey houses. There was an iron railing in front, and three steps, and at the side of the door three brass plates, bearing the names of two doctors and one dentist.

"The wrong place, of course," said Betty. "Doctors don't let rooms to scribes."

Nevertheless, she pressed the bell and put her inquiry to the maid who answered it, whether a Mrs. Thornton lived there.

"Third floor," said the maid; "wait a moment, please."

She put her mouth to a speaking tube on the wall and whistled. An answering whistle came down again.

"A young lady to see Mrs. Thornton," said the maid.

"Will you ask her to come up?" said the replying voice.

And Betty mounted the stairs, deeply impressed. She had heard nothing like *that* before in her life. Up she went, high, higher. Through an open door on the second floor she saw a luxurious room, with a luxurious red plush chair in it and a glittering machine beside it.

Betty had never been to a dentist in her

life. She had had one tooth only extracted, and that by the local chemist.

She went on, upwards and upwards, like Excelsior, and when she stood on the third storey, she saw yet another flight of stairs running skywards.

She stood on a square landing with two doors facing her. One was closed, one stood open.

Out of the open doorway came a woman. Betty scanned her face eagerly for signs of middle age, but it bore no mark that warranted one in supposing it had looked on more than three-and-thirty years of life.

The woman scanned Betty just as eagerly, and bade her come in and sit down somewhat abruptly. She was a tall, thin woman, blue-eyed, light-haired. Her complexion held the glow given by colder climes than Australia.

"I came about a room," said Betty shyly. She felt so very small, so very girlish, so very insignificant all at once.

"Yes—I saw you wanted one without furniture." Then they looked at each other. It seemed to Betty that the woman suddenly grew antagonistic to her.

"I do not know," she said brusquely, "why

I wrote to you. What do you want the room for?"

"To live in," said Betty. "I write—and I want to be quiet."

"To write in?" asked Mrs. Thornton. "You would not then want to eat there, or sleep there?"

Betty's eyes widened.

"It was stupid of me to forget," she said; "I ought to have said 'with use of kitchen.'"

"Oh," said the woman, and looked more than ever antagonistic.

"I don't think you would find me much in the way in the kitchen," said Betty. "I was hoping——" She hesitated.

"Yes?"

"I was hoping for an attic room," said the girl, and her eyes were eloquent.

"It is what you would call an attic," said the woman, less brusquely. "Would you like to come up?"

"Oh, yes," said Betty, with alacrity. It was the first attic she had been asked to view.

She went up the fourth flight of stairs and reached another landing. Here were three doors.

"This is the room," said Mrs. Thornton, pushing open a door. Betty entered.

The room was long and narrow. It ran from the front of the house to the back, and had an attic window at each end. The ceiling sloped, or was "bonnetted," after the manner of attics. The walls were white and clean—plastered; the floor, bare; there was no fire-place.

Betty ran across the floor to the front window. It showed her green tree-tops and a sky-world all soft blue, and billowy clouds.

"Oh!" said Betty. Her eyes fell. She saw the lower earth—tramcars far below, cabs, little people walking; *how* little they looked, *how* blissfully far away!

"Perfect!" she said, and ran to the back window. Here was blue and white sky-world, too. Lower, chimney tops and chimney tops; lower again, little cells of back yards.

"Oh!" exclaimed Betty again, "perfect, perfect!" She turned round. Mrs. Thornton was regarding her with a pleased smile.

"You could have quiet," she said.

"Yes," said Betty, "up four pair of stairs," with a thought to her father's quotation.

"Come down," said Mrs. Thornton, and led the way again. Going down the stairs, Betty bethought herself of shillings and pence. She

must be practical and not forget orthodox inquiries.

"People generally ask after drains and stoves when they look at houses," she told herself, "and neither matter to me up here. Only rent."

She sat down on the sofa edge again.

"About rent," she began.

Her hostess looked nonplussed, and annoyed.

"Yes," she said.

"About rent," repeated Betty earnestly.

They both flushed and regarded each other shamefacedly.

"I do not know anything about such things," said Mrs. Thornton; "I had not thought of it."

"I don't know *anything*," said Betty. "I've never engaged a room before."

They stared at each other again, and shuffled uncomfortably.

"*Won't* you think," said Betty.

"It's like this," said Mrs. Thornton; "my husband is a doctor and has gone to the Continent—and London. He may be two years away. He has left another man in his place, and we have let the other rooms. There are two doctors and one dentist, and they all go

home at night. I am lonely. The servant goes home. There is no one in the house but me. I thought if there was *someone* else."

"Oh," exclaimed Betty, "it is just what I wanted it to be. I longed for an attic and for either a widow lady, or an old maid, and you are as good as both!"

Then she stopped, gasped, grew scarlet, then white.

The next minute Mrs. Thornton laughed—a laugh of deep enjoyment.

The color came slowly back to Betty's face; she had managed to raise her eyes again.

"When would you wish to come?" asked Mrs. Thornton.

"At once," said Betty—"next week."

"I didn't show you—the bathroom is the room next to yours, the third room is a lumber room. I live in this room. If you will come I will show you the kitchen."

They returned to the landing, and Mrs. Thornton opened the other door there.

Betty thought she had never seen such a kitchen. The floor wore linoleum, there was a snow-white table, a white enamel gas stove, a long, white dresser, with an array of cups, white and quaint-shaped, of picturesque-looking jugs, of white plates of all sizes; there

were two big drawers to the dresser, each with peculiar, shining brass handles.

There was a sink in one corner, and hanging neatly over it brushes of all sorts, from the large scrubbing brush to the bottle brush. Then, on a higher level, but still upon the wall, a long row of scrupulously clean enamel saucepans.

Above the table was a green painted board, and hanging to this, on gilt screws, all kinds of household necessities—corkscrew, tin opener, egg whisk, chopping knife, scissors, etc.

Behind the door was a mangle. Everything was neat, natty, scrupulously clean and, in some way, uncommon.

Most kitchens possess such furniture, and yet but few looked like this one.

"What a beautiful kitchen!" said Betty, enthusiastically. "Even cooking would be a pleasure here."

"You can use it as you like," said Mrs. Thornton. "*I* do little cooking. In the basement I have my laundry—you can use that, too."

"Thank you," said Betty, "and I will have to think about my furniture. I have never furnished before. It is like being married."

"Have you anyone belonging to you?" asked Mrs. Thornton abruptly.

"Oh, lots," said Betty; "we are nine in the family altogether. I am the second eldest. My father is the editor of the *Mirror*. I want to make my own way in the world, and this is my plan."

They were still standing in the kitchen doorway.

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Thornton, giving the girl a kindly glance, "you will like to do as I have done—to hide the bedroom part of your room."

"I didn't notice," said Betty, "a curtain?"

Mrs. Thornton led the way back to the front room, and Betty looked round bewildered.

It was a square, lofty room, with two pairs of French windows opening on to a balcony.

There was an Axminster carpet square on the floor of soft sage green, and a surround of the same colored linoleum. Near the fireplace was an elegant cosy corner; across one corner a combination of desk and bookcase; across another, a wide-seated, many-cushioned sofa.

There were a few easy, comfortable chairs, a small table or two, and a screen. Little else.

"Bedroom?" echoed Betty.

"This is my drawing-room, dining-room, and bedroom," said the hostess.

Then she smiled at the bewilderment in the young face. She gave a few touches to the sofa, and it became a bed!

"I make it up each night," said Mrs. Thornton, "for I do believe in having comfort. I make the bathroom my wash-stand, and have a shelf there for a dressing table."

She pointed to the landing, whereon stood an old fashioned press.

"That holds most of my clothes," she said.

"What a splendid idea!" said Betty enthusiastically—"what a *splendid* idea! I don't want a drawing-room though—I only want a study. And you can *buy* beds like that, or was it made to order?"

"You can get them at Knox's at one pound nineteen and six each," said Mrs. Thornton.

The mention of money recalled Betty. She grew scarlet and began to stammer.

"We—we—did not finish about rent," she said.

Mrs. Thornton immediately put on her antagonistic look again. Betty learned to know that look later, and found it was donned when its owner felt the awkwardness of a position, and wished to hide that she did so.

"Eight shillings a week?" queried the girl.

"For an unfurnished room?" said Mrs. Thornton. "I am not a Shylock."

"Then six," said Betty, "or six-and-six-pence?"

"Six-and-six—and for an attic! I do not make my bread out of young girls."

"Then five," said Betty; "there are so many conveniences."

"No—no. There are four lots of stairs. It is a bad room, though *I* could live in it. We will say three shillings."

"But gas," said Betty, "and water."

"We will say three shillings. No more. I should be uncomfortable. It is my arrangement to get away from loneliness. It is not *talk* I want; but it's good to know there is someone else, even up at the roof, when one is lonely."

"Let us say four," said Betty. "Then I can boil my kettle with a happier mind. If you don't say four, I shall be reduced to cold water."

"Then—four," said Mrs. Thornton grudgingly. "I don't like it, and my husband would be vexed. What day will you come?"

"I'll write," said Betty, making her way to

the staircase head. "My father will come and look first."

"The room is there," said Mrs. Thornton. "You can just come or you can ring up—there is the telephone."

"Very well," said Betty, and held out her hand.

Mrs. Thornton gave her a limp hand-shake.

"I'm not sociable," she said; "I don't like much talk. I like myself—some days you may not see me at all."

"I'm like that," said Betty, and laughed. "We could each have caps," she added, "and just put them on when we want to be let alone."

She passed down the stairway, laughing, happy-eyed.

"How perfectly *beautiful* life is," she said to herself on the second floor landing.

She ran down the next flight and paused again.

"Four pairs of stairs—five to my attic," she said and looked up again to smile at the banisters. She passed out of the street door, still smiling, still happy.

CHAPTER XXI

"OTHER PEOPLE'S SHOES"

IT was a fortnight after Captain Carew's conversation with John concerning a profession.

There was on John's mind a trouble, and it seemed to grow darker every day.

It had nothing whatever to do with the question of being solicitor, surgeon, or even champion cricketer of the world.

Yesterday that had happened which had precipitated matters.

For perhaps three years John had recognised his own position in the captain's good books and household with an easy mind.

He had been adopted, he knew, for some good reasons connected with the captain's will and convenience.

Previously, being a boy of inventive mind, he had satisfactorily arranged the reason for his sudden translation from a rough bush home to this comfortable suburban one.

He was a boy of thirteen when this translation took place, and his new life speedily

brought him into communication with the young Bruces.

He learned that they, too, belonged to the captain. Then, that the captain regarded them with shut eyes. So he arranged a sort of genealogical tree (in which he figured as heir presumptive to the Carew Estate), stating that he was only son to Captain Carew's only son, while the Bruces were only the descendants of a mere daughter.

And that romance satisfied him for more than three years.

Then some one in the world of facts enlightened him, and proved to him quite conclusively that he was no relation at all to his supposed grandfather. Even the captain, when severely examined by the boy, owned there was no bond of blood between them.

John was sixteen, but it was not the age of chivalry with him then. He was in a sort of somnambulistic stage, and not afire to be or do anything in particular.

He liked To-day very well and dreamed about To-morrow.

But the lethargic stage passed, too.

Something very near akin to Chivalry and Romance stirred in his veins. Nobler impulses came to him. He longed to be a

knight-errant, to do and to dare, not necessarily for a "faire layde," but for a fair cause.

Two roads in life seemed to stretch before him. The one, easy, level, pleasant-faring—just such a road in fact, as seems to await the feet of most wealthy gentlemen's only sons.

He had only to go straight on, and in due time he would find himself well along the road, walking shoulder to shoulder with comrades who, like himself, had never conjugated the verb "to want," never tasted the bitterness of money frustrations, never known the terrors of looking into the face of Life alone, absolutely alone!

But the other road—he could see only the stony beginning of it, but he knew it went over the rocks of the world; he knew they who walked there had blistered feet and aching hearts, and he longed to walk among them.

He wanted to take life for himself, to fight his own fight; to get over and live down that now to him so terrible an indignity—being adopted!

Then yesterday happened upon the Scroll of Ages. He had come out of his grandfather's gate and was just about to turn his feet towards the Post Office corner, when there passed him in the roadway a cart.

It was travelling slowly, the driver looking half asleep and the horse well content that he should be so.

Then, through the still air came a cry—something like a coo-ee!—and John, looking backwards, saw Betty Bruce running down that bush track from her home.

She saw John and waved to the cart, crying: “Stop him—stop him!”

So John promptly stopped the driver of the cart. Breathlessly Betty came up. She carried a biscuit tin—large size—and a bird cage.

She went round to the side of the cart.

“You left these!” she panted. “They are—very important. I’d have got there—to-night with the bird—and there’d have been no cage! The tin is very important, too. Take care of it, please.”

John handed the well-corded tin and the empty cage up to the driver, and took a quick look at the contents of the cart.

There were two chairs, rather old, cane-seated ones, a roll of pillows and bedding, a small table, a kerosene box (out of which protruded two saucepan handles and a pink and white cup), a portmanteau, a tin trunk, several other biscuit tins, and a small bamboo table.

"Goo'day," said the man. "Gee up, there, my lass, git along."

Betty and John faced each other, and the cart rambled on down the red country road.

Betty was hatless; she wore a pink, cotton dress, old, and well washed. Pink was in her cheeks, scarlet in her lips, and a wonderful light in her brown eyes.

"Going to do a camp, any of you?" asked John, who was always ready for vagaries on the part of the Bruce family.

Betty laughed, a laugh of intense enjoyment.

"Do you remember, John," she said, "when you and I went out into the world to make our fortune?"

"Don't I!" said John with energy.

"We were ragged," said Betty.

"And barefoot," said John.

"I'd got a few pence tied up in my handkerchief, I think," said Betty.

"I believe I had a shilling," said John.

"And I sang songs at street corners, and made about a shilling an hour, and you——"

"I made threepence in the day, I think," said John.

Betty looked after the cart, and her eyes glowed.

"I'm better equipped to-day," she said, "a

little better. I've a box of groceries, and a pillow to rest my head on. But I'm off again, just as I was then, and——"

"What!" exclaimed John, almost leaping with surprise.

"It's true, most beautifully and wonderfully true," said the girl. "I'm going out into the world to earn my own living. No, not to stand at street corners and sing, but to live in an attic, and write, write, write——"

"But the children—your father——" said John.

"Dot's come home," said Betty. "*That's* all right."

The iron gate behind John clicked, and both young people turned and faced the captain.

All three flushed.

The captain because he knew that impudent madcap girl again—even though she was seventeen.

John because it was a predicament and so awkward.

Betty, because she always flushed at meeting the old man.

"Are you coming, John?" asked the captain.

"Not yet, sir," said John politely.

"Good-bye," said Betty, with a head toss.

John turned and walked beside her.

"I'll go with you to the gate," he said. Then, over his shoulder, to the captain: "I'll catch you up, sir."

The captain fumed along alone.

He had wisely ignored the friendship between John and his disowned grandchildren, although knowing it existed.

"That girl again!" he said, "the hoity-toity madam!"

"You're not going alone," said John to Betty; "it is such madness."

"Alone," said Betty.

"You've more than a shilling?" said John laughing nervously. "You're so mad, Betty."

"A box of groceries," said Betty, "truly, truly, instead of the usual half-crown or shilling. A few chairs and a table and a box of groceries! Wish me luck."

"I won't," said John hotly. "It's the greatest madness I ever heard of. Why doesn't Cyril go? Why you—a girl! It ought to be stopped!"

But Betty laughed again and again, and then ran along the track away from him, home.

John did not catch up with his grandfather. For one thing, the captain had gone striding along angrily, caught his tram, and gone city-

wards. For another, John went walking off across the country, through the bush, alone and angry.

He saw the thing quite clearly now, or thought he did.

Betty was brave—she always had been. Cyril, her twin, was a coward.

Betty was the one to do; Cyril to blame whatever was done.

There was that terrible incubus—the Family Poverty. John, of course, knew all about it. Knew how poor, pretty Mrs. Bruce had married against her father's will, had never been forgiven, and had died, poor, pretty, faded and worn.

He knew how Betty had striven to raise the family fortunes by trying to reconcile her irate grandfather, and had gone to his window one night, moaning and pretending to be a ghost, all to bring about a reconciliation and to, perhaps, get Cyril adopted.

He remembered how she had gone into the world a street singer, to raise the family fortunes, at eleven or twelve years old.

And now, here she was again, ready to face the world for the others. Alone! A girl!

John tramped across the bush-world, and reached the tramway road. It occurred to

him that he would never go home any more. That he would go anywhere over the harbor waters and take up life in the city.

He would be no longer, he told himself, that blot on creation—an adopted man.

Bitterly he took himself to task for his years of dependence.

"I have been in their place," he told himself—"in Cyril's, in Betty's. I've no right there—they, every right. They should have the life of plenty and ease—I, the struggle and the fight!"

Then the uselessness of just going away struck him. He must go back again and face the captain, and show him clearly wherein his duty lay, and that he, John, could no longer occupy what he felt to be their shoes.

So he took the road home again. And he strode up and down the verandas and through the lower floor rooms, and about the grounds.

And he rehearsed grandiloquent speeches after the manner of youth on fire, and he tried to see a little way down the stony road he was planning to tread. At noon the old man came home again, tired from his journey to town, somewhat worried over business, somewhat annoyed still with John.

If John had known anything about diplo-

macy, he would have postponed matters till after luncheon. But he knew nothing of it, he was very young, his blood was on fire, and he was burning to "right the wrong."

He went to his grandfather's study before the old man had even put down the packet he had carried from town. And he began at once.

"If you will give me a few minutes' private conversation, sir, I shall be very glad."

"Hem!" said Captain Carew testily.

"A little while ago," said John, beginning to pace the room, "you asked me to decide what I was going to be—doctor, lawyer or what——"

"Hem!" said the captain more testily.

"And I didn't know," said John, "or rather, I didn't say. For a long time now" (it might have been a month) "I have been ashamed of myself for being here at all. What right have I sponging on you? Why am I here, where—where others ought to be?"

The old man's eyes blazed.

"That girl's been at her games again," he said. "Does she want me to adopt her?"

"Pooh!" said John, "she never mentioned your name. I don't believe she *would* be adopted. What do you think she's doing—

going to do?" John wheeled round and faced the captain. "She's going out into the world to work for her family. She's seventeen! A girl! Do you think I can stand it? I to stay here where she ought to be, and she to go out working and probably half starving!"

"Do you want to go, too?" asked the captain, and a peculiar light of anger danced in his eyes.

"I'm going!" said John.

"Very good," said the old man.

"I'm going to take myself on my own shoulders," said John.

"Very good," said the old man again.

"And you'll let those be here—who should be here?" begged John. "I've worn their shoes long enough. I step out—let them step in!"

"Look here," said the old man, bursting with anger; "you've worn the shoes very comfortably for a good number of years. Now you're taking them off you needn't throw them at me. Go! Go out of my room. *At once, sir!*"

CHAPTER XXII

“AS IT WAS IN THE BEGINNING—”

IT was late afternoon when Betty reached her new home. She wore a grey, cambric blouse (a faithful chronicler would state that it was faded and out of date; a kind one, that it was fresh and pretty), a black serge skirt, rather short, a straw hat with a black band around it, and darned, cotton gloves.

And she carried a parcel, a dress-basket, and a tiny box with a perforated lid.

The parcel contained stories, and again stories, maybe half a score of them in various stages of incompleteness; the dress-basket, some articles of clothing she had forgotten to put in her trunk; and the tiny box, the only comrade she had to face the world with, her canary.

Three or four days ago her father had been to see Mrs. Thornton and the attic, and professed himself pleased and satisfied with both.

Betty knocked at the door of the high house in town, was received by the same maid, who

used the speaking tube as before, and sent her upstairs.

On the landing Mrs. Thornton met her, stiffly as upon the first occasion.

"Your things came," she said; "I had them taken to your room. I did not go up—I suppose they will be right."

"Oh, yes, thank you," said Betty cheerfully.

"There was a bird cage which was empty, I think."

"Yes, I brought my bird with me," said Betty.

Mrs. Thornton advanced and put her face close to the perforations.

"A canary!" she said. "Poor little thing. It is frightened."

"Not when he hears me," said Betty, and she spoke a few caressing words to her pet.

Mrs. Thornton's eyes rested more kindly on the girl.

"I will go up and get to work," said Betty. "A mansion like mine will take some putting in order."

"I have had it well scrubbed," said Mrs. Thornton.

"Thank you," said Betty, and ran up her last flight of stairs.

All her worldly goods had been placed in

the centre of the room. Around was a wide, long space of white floor—very white floor.

The windows at both ends of the room stood open, and the sweet, clean air of heaven swept through.

There are girls in the world in plenty who would have shuddered to have stood where Betty stood that day—girls who love jewelry, dress, gaiety, pleasure. To them the song of gladness that burst to Betty's lips as she walked round and round her kingdom would have been simply incomprehensible.

For a few brief minutes, overcome with gratitude that she was where she was, she knelt at her window and looked into the grey-blue sky that seemed so near to her, to offer up thanks that her little patch in Life's Garden was so very fair.

Then she began to work, having first restored her bird to his home, given him water and seed, and hung him up in the window.

She had no artistic deceptive bed like Mrs. Thornton. Pounds, shillings and pence, she had decided, were too precious to be wasted on such luxuries.

Her bed was a wire stretcher, and she had sawn several inches off the legs to make it the height of a sofa.

She called it her "trundle bed," and stood it across the corner of the room. When neatly made and spread with a Japanese rug, it certainly would have deluded its beholder into the belief that it was a sitting-room sofa—and nothing more. For her pillows she had made two cushion covers which, buttoned over the white pillow-slips by day, would still further help on the delusion.

Under her front window she stood her white deal writing-table, and no sooner had she put it into position than she must begin unpacking her biscuit tins to bring out pens, ink, etc.

And in the corner of a biscuit tin was the second chapter of a short story she had commenced about a month ago. She sat down on the floor to read it, leaning back against a table leg.

When she had read it through, a new idea for the third and last chapter occurred to her. At the time of writing the second chapter it had seemed to her impossible to tell her story in anything under six thousand words. And that was three thousand too many.

Now, after a month's forgetfulness, a way of telling it in half the number of words came to her.

She sprang up, drew a chair to the table

with one foot, and began to write. And her pen flew. She was almost unconscious of her words, but her pen seemed to know the secret.

And daylight died, and a soft half-light came into the attic, and the canary tucked his head under his wing and slept the sleep of the weary wayfarer.

Betty could hardly see to write her few last words, the artistic ending to her story that, in a few lines, made its incompleteness so complete.

A third knock came to her door. To the other two she had been deaf.

"Well?" she called dreamily, and writing on.

Of course, she expected the little home band to burst in upon her, demanding various attentions.

"I was wondering about your tea," said Mrs. Thornton, opening the door, and delicately avoiding even glancing into Betty's home.

"My tea?" repeated Betty.

She raised her head and stared through the surrounding dusk at the door.

"Oh, I forgot. I quite forgot. Thank you."

"I do not know at what time you have your tea, but it is after seven, and——"

"After seven!" exclaimed Betty, and her thoughts flew to the baby at home, who should be bathed and fed, to Dick and Pepper and Joan. "After seven!"

"And the kettle is boiling."

"Oh," said Betty, "thank you. I will come."

She looked down at her writing, but having raised her eyes from it, could not distinguish it in the half-light.

"I've brought you a tray," faltered Mrs. Thornton. "I thought, perhaps, you would not mind—your first night—and——"

"Oh, *thank* you," said Betty; "how *very* kind."

She went to the door. "Let me carry it in," she said. "I know where I put the table; then I'll get a light."

"You have no matches. I will fetch them from the bathroom."

Soon a yellow gas jet was burning, and showing to Betty's pleased eyes a most daintily-set tea-tray. A snow-white, beautifully-ironed tray-cloth, white china, white tea-pot, a frail, green, crumpled glass plate with little rolls of yellow butter on it, a bread plate hold-

ing a portion of a crisp French roll, and a white, Coalport china plate holding ruby-colored jam.

"How tempting it looks!" said the girl, who had never had such a tray put before her in her life before.

Mrs. Thornton's eyes, of necessity, and shamefacedly, took in the room. She felt afraid the young girl would resent her intrusion. But she could not but see the small, untidy array of goods in the centre of the room, the "trundle" bed, and the table. She moved to the door, pretending she had seen nothing.

"I forgot I was removing," laughed Betty. "I have just been writing a bit. Won't you sit down? I have a second chair."

"I am busy. I must go," said Mrs. Thornton. But she sat down nevertheless, and openly looked round the room.

Had Dot been the owner of that room and its goods, she would have flushed and been deadly ashamed. Not so Betty! She was as proud of her attic as a queen of her castle.

"Do you see my trundle bed?" she asked. "I think it's an excellent makeshift, don't you? *Anyone* would believe it was a sofa only."

"Ye-es," said Mrs. Thornton, and longed to

tell the girl that her pillow covers were ugly and badly made.

"I've not quite decided what to do with my floor yet," said Betty. "How would a painted floor do?"

"Very well indeed—if you get the right color. A dull green would look well, *or* you could stain a border round and put down a carpet square."

"Er-um," said Betty, "I fancy I'll paint it. I would leave it as it is for the boards look so nice and white, but it would show footmarks too much."

"You'll use the bathroom for dressing-table and wash-stand, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes," said Betty, commencing hungrily upon her roll and butter; "and I'll buy a screen to keep all my untidiness behind—dresses, boots, boxes, etc.——"

Mrs. Thornton made a movement to go.

"I am down in the basement generally," she said; "if you want me for anything, call down the tube."

"Thank you," said Betty, "but I sha'n't. I have so much to do—I really ought to unpack."

But when at last she was alone, she went on leisurely nibbling her bread and butter, and

reading through the chapter she had written.

When she had quite finished, which was somewhere about eight o'clock, she bethought herself of the washing-up, and, carrying her tray, went diffidently downstairs.

A low light burned in the sitting-room, the door stood ajar, and silence reigned.

In the kitchen the light was a trifle higher, and all was clean, tidy, and deserted.

Betty quickly washed up, replaced the tea things on the tray, and was very careful to leave all as neat as she had found it.

Returning to her attic, for one inquisitive minute she leaned over the bannisters and looked into the abyss below. All was dark as midnight—dark and absolutely silent!

"I wonder what on earth she can want in the basement," said Betty; "it's the last place I'd trouble." She ran lightly upstairs. "We're far enough apart, goodness knows," she said. "If we were deadly enemies even, the distance ought to satisfy us."

She reached her room again and shut the door.

"I must get tidy," she said. "I will prepare things for to-morrow, and make my list."

The biscuit tins she stored, for the most part, under her writing table, promising her-

self that upon some to-morrow she would put a flounce around the legs, to hide the unsightliness of whatever she might choose to place there.

Then she attacked the box of groceries, emptied it, carried it to a corner, and turned its back to the room. She then regarded it as a cupboard.

"I might paint its back, or something," she told herself.

Next she unpacked her kerosene box, and made another cupboard of it, besides the grocery one, and she arranged in it her two small saucepans, four china plates, two cups and saucers, her small assortment of knives, forks, and spoons, tea-pot, sugar-basin, and two jugs.

By then, however, she was tired of her housewifery, and her mind would return to the list she was longing to make. So she was soon at her table again under the gas jet.

She found a clean sheet of paper and wrote:

"ONE POUND A WEEK"

for a heading. Then underneath—	s.	d.
Rent and gas.....	4	0
Food		

She had at this stage to find another piece of paper, and work out a separate sum.

"Bread. How many loaves a week do I eat? Of bread like that to-night, I suppose *seven*. Of those hideous tin loaves, like the ones at home—say, one. Still, I won't stint in bread, as it's the staff of life. I'll allow myself three loaves. Three loaves, at $3\frac{1}{2}d.$ a loaf, $10\frac{1}{2}d.$, say a shilling.

"Meat I'll buy ready cooked—say two shillings a week for meat. Butter—say sixpence. I won't have vegetables; they're silly things. Groceries—two shillings a week. What is that? Five shillings and sixpence. Pooh! too much. I must cut down somewhere. Meat. That'll do. That brings it to five shillings."

She turned back to her list.

	£	s.	d.
Rent and gas	0	4	0
Food	0	5	0
Dress	0	5	0
Traveling	0	1	0
To send home	0	2	0
Paper, books, furniture, &c. ..	0	3	0
	1	0	0

"There is no room for luxuries," she said. "It will be a tight fit. Still, I *can* economise in food. I'll study some other way of living. It's eating and dress that costs the most, so in both I must just cut down."

So saying she put her list away, and sitting down again at her table, copied out the story she had written.

It was midnight when she sought her "trundle" bed!

CHAPTER XXIII

COMMENCING WORK

IN the morning she was not up till nearly nine o'clock. She had coffee with condensed milk in it for her breakfast and bread and butter. Not French roll bread, but just a slice off the tin loaf she had brought from home.

Then she made her bed, put on hat and gloves, took her neatly tied up manuscript into her hand, and ran downstairs and out into the street.

She was at the *Sydney Times* office by ten o'clock, climbing the long flight of stairs lightly and happily.

At the head of the stairs she almost ran into the arms of a lady just about to descend—a florid, stout lady of middle age.

The girl and the woman looked at each other for one swift minute, and then passed on.

"One of the many besiegers of editors, I suppose," said Betty to herself, hurrying on.

She reached the editor's door and knocked,

trembling almost as violently as upon the first occasion.

There was no reply, so she waited politely. The fate of some story might be trembling in the balance, she told herself, and an interruption might turn the scale unfavorably.

And if it were her own!

In five minutes she knocked again, and again waited. By this time her trembling had, if possible, become more violent. So she waited another five minutes.

Then she fancied she heard other steps on the stairs, and her imagination showed her a bevy of middle-aged ladies, carrying manuscripts; so she knocked again sharply.

This time the door was flung open, and the editor, looking irate, faced her.

The sight of her white face calmed him.

"I've been calling out 'Come in' for about an hour," he said. "Come in, come in. It's Miss Bruce, isn't it? Find a seat—sit down—excuse me five minutes."

He returned to his table, and went on writing in a furious kind of way.

And Betty found a chair, all piled up with books and papers, and she sat down on the extreme edge of it, keeping herself in position by pressing her feet firmly on the floor.

Presently the door opened again, and a young, grave-looking man entered. He gave Betty a cursory glance, put his hat down on an upturned box, and sitting down in front of a typewriter, began to click away in spasms—now a rush of clicks, now a silence, now another rush, now another silence.

The editor, without raising his head, said, as if he were addressing his ink-pot—

“Get out Mrs. Swanson’s papers, Ferguson. Give ’em to Miss Bruce,” and went on writing again.

So the young man left his machine, went to some pigeon holes, extracted a big roll of papers, and looked at Betty again.

“Will you have them done up?” he asked shyly.

Betty flushed and paled.

“If you please,” she said—“no, thank you. I mean—I don’t know.”

The editor put down his pen.

“Toss them here, Ferguson,” he said. And Ferguson laid them down and went back to his machine.

Then Betty felt the eyes of the Great Man on her, and she began to tremble again.

“You’ve got a very uncomfortable chair,” he said kindly. “Take mine—here.”

"Oh, no," said the girl nervously.

"I'll sit here," said the editor, and he swung himself lightly on to his table, which put Betty a trifle more at her ease.

"Mrs. Swanson was here just before you," said the editor smiling. "She laid down her crown and sceptre; here they are for you to take up." He passed two keys over to her. "That is the key to your room—that to your desk. Come along, I'll show you."

He led the way from his room, down the passage to another door.

"This room," he said, "belongs to you and the fashion writer, Miss Jones. That's your desk—that's hers. Whenever you feel inclined to turn in here, you can. There's a letter-box on the door. Your correspondence is put in there. You must be sure of your facts, you know. No bogus marriages, or anything of that sort to get us into hot water. Put in only affairs of importance and interest, and give the rest to Miss Jones for her Saturday's letter. Come along, we'll get Mr. Ferguson to roll up your papers. You'd better look in daily, if convenient. Invitations, cards, etc."

He led the way back to his own room.

"Parcel up the papers, Ferguson," he said.

Then his eyes fell on the manuscript in Betty's hand.

"Is that one?" he asked. "Toss it over."

"No-no," said Betty; "it's—it's only a story." And, of course, she flushed and paled and flushed most rapidly.

"For me?" said the editor kindly, and perceiving her embarrassment, "I didn't know you went in for that sort of thing. I'll have a look at it to-day or to-morrow."

Betty had intended her story for another magazine, but she was far too overpowered by the magnitude of the man before her to say so.

She carried her bundle of papers home, and mounted to her attic once more. She had a week in which to write her letter, but she decided to commence it, if possible, to-day.

So she opened her bundle.

There was an account of a social at Redfern, at which Miss McQuade had worn a beautiful costume of sky-blue silk, and Mrs. McQuade a splendid dress of *eau de nil* satin. An account of an "At Home" at Bondi, at which Mrs. Harry Behairs had worn daffodil *chene de soie*, and a berthe of lilies of the valley, and Mr. Harry Behairs had made an imposing Master of Ceremonies.

There were four letters descriptive of weddings, each on a pattern with the other—"the bride looked lovely in a gown of pure white silk, and wore a veil and carried a shower bouquet, the present of the bridegroom. The mother of the bride wore——, and the sisters and the cousins and the aunts! and the presents were numerous and handsome. And after the breakfast the happy couple went to the coast, or the mountains."

There was a letter describing the coming-of-age party given to Mr. Harold Smith's son, John; and another, describing the golden wedding party of Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Jones, of Kangaroo Gully.

"I don't think any of them are important, or *very* interesting," said Betty. "I think I'll give them to Miss Jones. What's this?—a card for an evening at Elizabeth Bay to-morrow. I know Elizabeth Bay is a fashionable place. Mrs. Duncan Robertson! Important, I think; I've heard of her. And what's this? The Mayoress' reception on the fifteenth; and two tickets for the pantomime!

After much cogitating, she decided to ring Cyril up and ask him to escort her to Elizabeth Bay; so she went downstairs to the telephone.

Mrs. Thornton, in a big cooking apron, came out of the kitchen and nodded and smiled at her as she rang up.

To tell the truth, she was pleased to see the girl's bright face on her third storey kingdom.

"Is that you, Cyril?" asked Betty. "Would you do something to oblige me very much? Promise before I tell you! You won't? Well—*will* you take me to an evening at Elizabeth Bay to-morrow? Oh, I don't know the people; it's only in the interests of my work; I've to go—Oh, *do* go with me, Cyril, there's a dear. Oh, please do! I'd do more than that for you. Evening dress? Oh, it doesn't matter. No one will look twice at us. You won't? Very well, Cyril Bruce, wait till I ask you again!"

She put down the receiver, and was turning back to her attic stormily, when Mrs. Thornton came to the doorway again.

"You don't seem to be thinking about your dinner," she said.

"*Surely* it's not time?" said Betty.

"It's half-past twelve."

"Oh, dear! what a nuisance food is. I'll have dinner to-night, and just lunch now."

"Lunch with me," said Mrs. Thornton

eagerly; "*do*, unless you are too proud to have it in the kitchen."

So they lunched together on the white kitchen table.

Betty sat near the mangle and Mrs. Thornton near the gas stove; and they had fried eggs and bacon, as well as delicious coffee with cream in it.

And they talked!

In an hour Mrs. Thornton knew the name and age of the members of Betty's family, from Dot down to the baby. She knew the mother was dead; and she had a fair idea of the way the wheels ran at home.

And Betty knew that the hostess could use a hammer and a chisel and a plane. That she had made most of the furniture in her sitting-room and the drawers and cupboards in her kitchen. That she was fond of carving and modelling, and that her workroom was down in the basement.

"This table," said Mrs. Thornton shyly, giving a dainty little table a tap—"Oh, no, it is not good. It is full of faults; the polishing is bad——"

"You didn't polish it?" exclaimed Betty.

"It did not polish itself. Now this desk—when I stained that——"

"You didn't make that?" exclaimed Betty breathlessly.

"I did. Oh, it isn't good. It is very bad indeed!"

"It's absolutely perfect," said Betty. "I never saw anything more perfect in my life. It's—it's simply wonderful! Fancy a *woman* making it! Who taught you?"

"No one," said Mrs. Thornton simply. "I never had a lesson in my life. Anyone could do it."

"I couldn't if I lived to be a hundred."

"At a hundred your hand would probably be too shaky and your back troublesome."

They went back to the kitchen, and Betty suggested they should wash up.

"I will do it later on," said her hostess.

But the girl rolled up her sleeves and found the tin bowl.

"Let's get it done with," she said; "the more we think of it the worse it grows. I suppose you're really aching to get back to your hammer. Are you making furniture now?"

"Only an overmantel," said Mrs. Thornton.

Betty dipped the silver in the water and twirled it with a mop.

And somehow before they had progressed to the plates, Betty had confided in her host-

ess the sort of writing she was engaged on for the *Sydney Times*, and Mrs. Thornton had stated that she knew Mrs. Swanson, the late writer, by sight very well.

And before they had finished, they had arranged to go together to the pantomime on Saturday night.

Then the telephone demanded attention, and Mrs. Thornton answered it—and called Betty.

"Yes?" said Betty.

"It's only me," said Cyril. "Look here, if you'll answer for it that no one shall look at us, I'll take you to-morrow night."

"Oh, Cyril—you angel!" said Betty rapturously.

"What time shall I fetch you?" asked Cyril.

"Seven," said Betty. "Let us get there before the crush, and find a secluded corner. Cyril—you're—you're—a sparkling demi-god!"

"It's the blessed evening suit that bothers me—good-bye."

"That's just like Cyril," said Betty, running back to the kitchen. "He must have his growl first. I'll have to look up a dress, and then no more thought for gaiety."

"Well, I'm going down," said Mrs. Thornton. "I'm busy with the glue-pot to-day.

Oh, I meant to tell you—I've a tin of green paint you can have for your floor if you like. Oh, it's the right green, you need not look doubtful!"

"It wasn't the shade of green I was thinking of," said Betty, "it was only I don't see why I should rob you."

"Nay; I shall *never* use it. I got it to do a floor and then changed my mind. Besides, you need not rob me. You can leave it on the floor."

"Then I'll do it now," said Betty with enthusiasm.

"You can move your bed into the next room for a night or two," said Mrs. Thornton. "You go, and I will bring the paint up to you."

It was a back-breaking piece of work Betty found, but she was liberally endowed with energy and endurance.

In the beginning of the afternoon she sang and worked, and when darkness came it found her working without singing.

But the first coat was on her floor—all over it.

"I'll finish it to-morrow," she said, as she crept into her trundle bed at nine o'clock, aching and tired; "then I can impress Cyril with

my attic. But oh, what a pity things want a second coat in this life!"

She finished by twelve o'clock the next morning, for the second coat went on, she found, more easily than the first.

Then she dressed and went to the office again. No correspondence awaiting her, she was leaving again when she ran into Mr. Ferguson in the passage.

"Oh, Miss Bruce," he said, "I'm so glad to see you. Would you think me a nuisance—would you help me over a difficulty?"

"If I can," said Betty diffidently.

"Who—who cuts the wedding cake—the bride, the bridegroom, or the best man?"

"The bride," said Betty emphatically.

"Oh, thank you," said Mr. Ferguson, and immediately darted back into his room.

"*What* a funny young man," said Betty to herself, continuing her way downstairs. "I suppose he's going to be married."

On the staircase she met the editor.

"About that story of yours," was his greeting, and no hand-shake or good-morning—"it's first-rate. I've passed the account. I can just get it into the Christmas number. Ask at the counter for your money on Friday."

He went on upstairs.

"Oh!" said Betty—"Oh! oh! oh!" and she only just managed not to sit on the step behind her with amazement. "Oh dear! oh dear! Sure this is none of I!"

* * * * *

AT seven o'clock that night Cyril rang the bell of the tall house in which Betty lived. It was in darkness except for a light in a front attic window, he noticed. Betty herself opened the door. She was wonderfully glad to see her twin again, and as soon as he was in the hall and the front door was closed, she embraced him most lovingly.

"Here—let me go! You don't know who's looking," said Cyril, disengaging her arms from his neck and looking nervously around him.

"There's no one to look," said Betty, laughing. "Come upstairs; I must show you my mansion. Isn't this a beautiful house?"

"Can't say I'm much struck yet," said Cyril, following her upstairs.

"It's so wonderfully convenient. There's a speaking tube, and if you stayed here and I ran to the top storey, we could talk to each

other quite easily, in *nearly* a whisper, through it."

"Don't I know the blessed things? We've one in our office."

"Oh, I think they're lovely. And there's a telephone."

"I wish to goodness telephones had never been invented," said Cyril. "I'd get lots more trips out of our office, I can tell you, running messages, if it weren't for the telephone."

"Come back, come back," laughed Betty. "That's Dr. Thrower's room, and that's the dentist's."

"However much higher?" growled Cyril. They reached the next storey.

"No. That's the kitchen," said Betty, laughing. "Higher still, and higher."

She ran up the next flight of stairs, followed by Cyril.

"There ought to be a lift," he said; "it's perfectly preposterous!"

Betty pushed open her door.

The floor looked remarkably well. The sofa cushions were shaken up and tidy, the writing table was in glorious confusion, the "household" corner seemed just a collection of kerosene boxes turning their backs on the world.

Betty stood in the middle of the room, looking radiant—glowing eyes, scarlet lips and cheeks. She was in evening costume or, to be correct, she wore an evening blouse Dot had sent to her eighteen months before—a white silk one, with white lace and soft ruchings upon it—and a dark walking skirt.

“Isn’t it a splendid room?” she said. “Right up at the top of the house away from everyone! Look at my floor, isn’t it pretty?”

“Um,” said Cyril, “only paint.”

Betty’s face fell a little, just a little. She was brave and bright, but a word or two in praise of her home and new life would have filled her heart to overflowing.

Then her eyes opened widely.

“Where did you get your coat?” she asked.

“I borrowed another fellow’s—Chalmers. It fits all right, doesn’t it?”

“Yes,” said Betty, slowly and added, “I wish, though, you had your own.”

Cyril strutted across the room.

“Where’s your glass?” he enquired.

“In the bathroom,” said Betty; “but you don’t want it. I never saw you look so nice in your life.”

She spoke in all sincerity.

She turned out the gas and they went down-

stairs. Mrs. Thornton came out of her sitting-room and was introduced to the good-looking youth by his proud sister.

And after they had left her and slammed the front door, she went to her balcony to watch them go up the street.

How young they were! All life seemed to open up beneath their feet. How blithe, how bonnie they looked! The best of the earth was theirs, all possibilities were their own, she thought.

But—how poor, how undisguisedly poor!

They took the tram to Elizabeth Bay and Betty smuggled into Cyril's hand the money for their fares.

They had a short walk when they got out, and a little difficulty in finding the house, but at last they stood before it—a many-windowed, brilliantly lighted mansion.

Quite a stream of people from carriages was entering the front door.

"I daren't go in," said Betty, and pressed her hand suddenly to her heart.

Cyril was nervous, too.

"Let's go back," he said; "it's an awfully silly game. Let's go back."

Then his twin perceived he needed some of that courage she had so frequently to instil.

She laughed.

"One to be ready, two to be steady, three to be off and away," she said, and marched in the doorway in the wake of a portly lady, and Cyril had perforce to follow.

A white-capped maid led her to the dressing-room, and looking over her shoulder, Betty beheld the nervous Cyril following other swallow-tails in an opposite direction.

They met again in the hall, and before they could consider whither to direct their steps, a stately man-servant met them, indicated that they were to follow him, and near the doorway of a handsome room, inclined his ear to Betty's mouth.

She coughed; but he did not move. So she coughed again. He still waited.

Then book knowledge came to her rescue, and crimsoning to the tips of her ears, she said—

"Miss Bruce."

The next moment the sound of her name seemed to fill space. From every corner of the room came back the echo of the man's loud announcement—"Miss Bruce!"

Then "Mr. Bruce!" even louder.

And the two white young things glided into that, to them, most dreadful room.

A lady with very kind but puzzled eyes took Betty's hand.

"So very pleased," she murmured. Still, she seemed to be waiting, like all the rest of the world.

"For the *Sydney Times*," said Betty, and pathos was in her eyes.

"Oh," said the lady, "oh—I was looking for Mrs. Swanson."

"I am Mrs. Swanson," said the girl. "I—I mean, I and my brother are instead of her."

"I see. I am very glad to meet you. *Do* find a comfortable seat. A lovely night, is it not?"

"Sir James and Lady McIntosh," shouted the servant, and an ancient-looking couple followed the boy and girl into the room.

"Everyone's looking at us!" said Cyril.

"Let them!" said Betty defiantly.

"Let's get out of that veranda door and cut home," said Cyril, as they reached a side of the room.

"I *won't*!" said Betty. "Imagine we're war correspondents, and have just got to the front. We wouldn't run away again as soon as we saw smoke. Isn't this a beautiful window seat! Lean back and imagine you're a judge and I'm your old maiden sister."

But Cyril was far too wretched to allow his imagination to play.

He sat down next to Betty and tugged at his upper lip, which was as guiltless of any signs of moustache as Betty's own.

"It's all very well for you," he said, "but *I* hate being stared at. My coat doesn't fit on the shoulder, and I'm the only fellow not in proper evening dress."

"Look at that pretty girl over there," said Betty, " isn't she a picture? I wonder who she is! Her name ought to be Pearl."

"Let's get out on the veranda," whispered Cyril.

"Don't be so silly," said Betty. "It would be a great deal worse coming in again. I was getting on very well as your worship's sister. Oh, for goodness' sake let us forget who we are for a little while. Here's Mrs. Robertson; I believe she is coming to us. I've got to notice what her dress is, etc."

Cyril broke into a cold perspiration, stood up, and precipitately fled through the open door to the veranda.

And Betty sat on alone. She watched her hostess progress down the room, admiring intensely her easy graceful carriage and simple manners.

But Mrs. Duncan Robertson was far too busy to notice the lonely girl in the window seat.

Music struck up in the next room, and she, with three or four other ladies, moved there, presumably to listen.

Cyril did not come back; he absolutely lacked the courage; and Betty felt it incumbent on her to leave her sheltered seat.

"In the interests of my letter," she told herself, "I must try and find out who is who."

So she went round on the edge of the crowd, as it were. She lingered in the doorway of the music room; she got lost in a little crowd in the hall, and she noted the floral decorations of the drawing-room.

Then, crossing the hall to return to the reception-room, she came upon Cyril, hiding, in misery, behind a pillar in the hall.

"Betty!" he whispered. She saw his face.

"We'll go if you like!" she said.

"Oh!" he said gratefully, "come on!"

So they sought each their respective cloak room.

They had been there in all perhaps an hour and a half, and no one in all that happy-seeming throng had given them a kindly smile or word.

They had been as unnoticed as the flies on the high tar ceilings.

Everyone seemed to know everyone else. Only no one had even a half-smile for Betty or Cyril.

As they left the hall to step into the night, a singer's passionate voice was pleading:

"Ora pro nobis—Ora pro nobis!" and a great wave of emotion passed over sensitive Betty, to whom few beautiful songs ever came.

She caught Cyril's arm.

"How beautiful!" she said.

"What?" asked Cyril.

"Something—somewhere. I—don't know what."

She looked at the stars, and they walked on down the quiet street.

"I never felt such a stuffed monkey in my life," said Cyril.

"Let us take an omnibus," said Betty weariedly; "let us get home."

She was too young to analyze her feelings, but as they stepped into the omnibus she said wistfully to Cyril:

"Now I know what it is to feel an outcast, don't you?"

CHAPTER XXIV

"DOT, THE HOUSEWIFE"

IN taking up the reins of home affairs, Dot made no list, like Betty had done when resolving to do her duty as a housewife.

She was a methodical young person by nature, and required no such memory-stimulant.

For her first three days at home she had been treated with politeness as a visitor.

For her second three days, Betty's scheme had been on foot and things domestic had been more or less disorganized. Dot had been something of a household angel then, having just enough of cares cast upon her to prove her capabilities.

But upon the seventh day, Betty and her small cartload of goods went away into the big world, and the five children, Mr. Bruce, Cyril, and the house seemed to settle with one fell swoop upon Dot's slim shoulders.

But she was earnest-purposed and enthusiastic, and her desire to become that Ideal Woman, so revered by good men like Dr. Mark,

made her see golden sunshine in places where the light was only a dull grey.

Still, it was a little bewildering that baby should choose the eighth day to be feverish and fractious.

She had been fretful and restless all night, and Dot, whose sleep had never been disturbed by anyone in all her twenty-one years before, arose on the morning of the eighth day more tired than when she had gone to bed at night.

She had moved into Betty's bed, and slept with the children near her, as Betty had done.

And through the greater part of the night she had walked the baby up and down the room or rocked her in the old rocking-chair.

When the worry and confusion of breakfast was over, and it *was* a worry and confusion even for that household versed in such things, when Mr. Bruce and Cyril had gone away sad and lunchless, Dot told Mary that baby had missed Miss Betty and fretted for her all night.

"Lor'!" said Mary; "you wouldn't think that, knowing!"

"Is she often cross at night?" asked wearied Dot.

"Scarcely never!" said Mary. "Miss Betty said she beat Pepper for goodness."

"I walked her up and down all night long," said Dot.

"Oh, Miss Betty never did that. P'r'aps she ain't well."

"Um," said Dot, and went back to her bedroom where she had left baby sleeping.

Dot looked at her wonderingly. How did one find out if a baby was not well? Enquiries were of no use. Of what avail to ask—

"Don't you feel well to-day, baby? Does your head ache, or your throat, or what?"

"She has a splendid color," said Dot; "there can't be much wrong. Still, I'll look in my book."

She closed her door. No one must find her learning when she so desired to seem all-learned. She turned to "Childish Illnesses," commencing at A.

"Anæmia." None of the symptoms agreed with baby's fine color and plump condition.

"No anæmia, at any rate," said Dot thankfully.

"Bronchitis." No symptoms of bronchitis!

"Not bronchitis," breathed Dot; "the way to find out what she has is to find out what she has not."

"Convulsions," "Feverishness," "Diseases of the Ears," "Cleft Palate," "Earache."

Dot was a little inclined to think baby had earache. The book said babies suffered from the complaint oftener than was imagined; that they moved their heads restlessly from side to side and cried very much.

So she closed her book and went to the kitchen, deciding to follow book instructions when baby woke up.

She tacked upon the kitchen wall a list of Mary's duties for the week. A list such as her Book on Household Economy urged for each servant in an establishment.

And Mary spent much precious time in examining the list, in wondering over it, and in seeking Dot to ask for explanations.

Dot also drew up a menu for the week, dealing with breakfasts, a meal she entitled "Nursery Dinner," and another "Late Dinner."

For those who take an interest in bills of fare, Dot's for Wednesday, her eighth day at home, is inserted.

- "Breakfast."* .. Oatmeal Porridge, and Bread-and-Milk. Scrambled Eggs, Toast, Coffee, Scones.
- "Nursery Dinner"* .. Mutton Broth, Fried Brains, Potatoes, and Cauliflower; Stewed Apricots and Custard.

"Late Dinner" ..Soup; Roast Lamb and Mint
 Sauce, Peas, and Potatoes;
 Queen's Pudding.

As can be seen, it was in reality a simple menu. Nothing either elaborate or expensive figured upon it. And yet!

The breakfast, as had been said, was a failure, a dismal failure, and no fault of Dot's.

There was burnt porridge and burnt toast, and coffee; a scramble without any eggs!

For the "Nursery Dinner" Dot had a consultation with Mary.

She went to the kitchen with her second list in her hand, and she looked refreshingly housewifely in a large, holland apron.

"Mary," she said, "about the children's dinner. Oh, you mustn't let your fire out so early in the day! There should be a good bright fire in every kitchen all day long."

"I'm *that* short of wood," said Mary; "Mr. Cyril's not given me a bit for nearly a week."

"Then burn coal," said practical Dot.

"Coal! Lor! We ain't never had no coal!"

"Then coke."

But Mary just smiled her widest smile, and

shook her head.

"Nor coke neither," she said. "I'll just have to manage best way I can for to-day. But he'll have to chop me some for to-morrow."

"I'll speak to him," said Dot. "Now about the dinner. I want fried brains and mutton broth."

"Brains!" echoed Mary blankly.

"Did Miss Betty never have them?"

"Never," said Mary, and disgust showed in every feature.

"What time does the butcher come?"

"He comes this morning for to-morrow's order like."

"Oh dear!" groaned Dot, "then I can't get what I want till to-morrow?"

"No," said Mary, giggling.

"What have we got?"

"Some cold beef."

"We had that yesterday."

"I know. Miss Betty was great on cold meat."

"For the pudding," said Dot—"stewed apricots and custard."

"Hapricots!" cried Mary.

"Yes—apricots! Are there none? Is that what you want to say?"

"Oh, no. Only nobody touches 'em but the master!"

So there was not one item on the card for the eighth day nursery dinner that could be indulged in except custard.

And Dot made it, and Mary minded it—and it curdled!

So the dinner consisted of cold beef, potatoes and curdled custard on the eighth day. And Dick and Pepper cried and Joan looked sad.

Only in Nancy's eyes all was well, for the queen could do no wrong, and even a curdled custard made by Dot was preferable to the sweetest of sweet dishes that Betty could have cooked.

In the afternoon baby was too decidedly ill to allow Dot to remember the Late Dinner, beyond issuing certain orders to Mary.

She, acting upon book advice, wrung a sponge out of hot water, and held it to baby's ear—first one ear and then the other. And she poured warm oil in—first to one and then the other; and she walked baby about, and she rocked her—and, in the privacy of her bedroom, she cried.

When her father came home the house was, of course, in that delightful condition known

as "at sixes and sevens."

The table in the dining-room was roughly set, and Dot was pacing up and down the floor.

One glance at her flushed face told her father that she had found the troubles of life many and heavy.

"Baby has earache," she said, "and I've done everything I know to relieve her, yet listen!"

"How do you know it's earache?" asked Mr. Bruce.

"She is so restless and cross," said Dot, "and they say babies suffer more frequently from earache than is supposed."

Mr. Bruce approached his youngest born and touched her soft, flushed cheek.

"She is feverish," he said.

"Feverish!" exclaimed Dot.

"Very. We'll give her a hot bath and a pack."

"A pack?" said Dot.

"A wet compress. I'll do it. My dear child, don't look so alarmed. Pretty well all your childish ailments have been so cured."

So before the Late Dinner took place, the editor took off his coat, rolled up his sleeves,

bathed his baby, and wrapped her in a wet sheet and a dry blanket.

And miserable Dot looked on.

She had so many "Hints on Sick Nursing," she had it written down how to make a bed with clean sheets without disturbing the patient; how to sweep out a sick-room without making a dust; how to administer medicine, how to take a temperature!

But how to reduce baby's fever she knew no more than the baby herself.

And she was twenty-one years of age.

Presently baby slept, and the family gathered together for their evening meal.

No one spoke much.

Mr. Bruce after his exertions had relapsed into a thoughtful retrospective mood.

Dot was miserable. The whole world appeared to have conspired against her. As soon as dinner was ended, she hurried to her room, but as she went she heard Cyril say between a sigh and a groan.

"Heigho! for Betty again!"

And her father replied sharply—

"H'sh!"

CHAPTER XXV

BETTY'S GREAT NEWS

DOT was walking up the first flight of stairs to Betty's high home, for the first time since Betty had occupied it—four months ago now. Nancy, in a white muslin frock (made from one of Dot's last summer gowns) and a daffodil-colored sash, was two steps in advance of her beloved elder sister.

"She'll be very much surprised," said Dot, laughing.

"She'll be very inky," said Nancy, with a touch of her old tartness.

On the third storey Mrs. Thornton came out and looked at them. She wore a huge apron and a worried frown.

"Miss Bruce?" said Dot politely.

"The next floor," said Mrs. Thornton shortly, and adding, "I'm not sure if she's in," turned back to her sitting-room.

Dot and Nancy climbed higher.

"I *wish* we had a lovely lot of stairs like this!" said Nancy.

"H'sh!" said Dot.

Their footsteps creaked on the landing; they crossed to the doorway and peeped in. Betty stood near a window, her back to them. She was in the act of running a pin through the hat she had just put on her head.

She was also talking to herself.

"May we come in?" asked Dot.

Betty gave a little cry and ran to her, and in the exuberance of her delight threw her arms round her sister and embraced her warmly.

"Oh, I *am* glad to see you," she said. "Oh, I am very, very, *very* glad to see you."

She kissed Nancy lovingly, exclaiming, to that small maiden's delight,

"What have you done to Nancy? I've never seen her look so nice before!"

"Do you think she is looking better?" asked Dot.

There was a soft color in Nancy's cheeks; most of the yellowness had gone; her eyes were clearer, her cheeks fatter.

"Wonderful!" said Betty.

"She's under Dr. Parbury," said Dot proudly, "and she's having cod liver oil and no school; plenty of play and sunshine."

"Er—um," said Betty.

Then she brought out chairs for her visitors and her tin trunk for herself.

"I was coming home for the day on Sunday," she said.

"About time," said Dot. "You've not been for ages."

"I know. And these last two days so much has happened to me that I'm not absolutely certain of my own identity."

"Not *bad*?" said Dot, and looked at her sister a trifle anxiously.

Betty's face was much thinner than it had been four months ago, and though flushed just now, the city was taking from it the rose-red color that the bush had given. She looked altogether an older and in some indescribable way a sadder Betty than the one who had left home so gleefully.

"No," said Betty, "not bad."

She went to her writing-table and rummaged about, coming back with a letter, which she gave to Dot.

"Read that," she said, "and try to faint."

And Dot read.

It was a letter from Captain Carew, their grandfather, and it invited Betty to meet him at his solicitor's office at a certain time on the previous day.

"Shall you go?" asked Dot.

"I went," said Betty, "yesterday. He—he wanted to adopt me."

Dot's golden eyebrows climbed high up on her lineless forehead, and her blue eyes widened and widened.

"*You!*" she said, "*you*. Why *you?*"

"It's an old story," said Betty, "and it really belongs to long ago, to when I was such another as Nancy. Do you remember my running away to make my fortune as a singer, and being brought home by a greengrocer, asleep? Well, the solicitor told me *privately* that that episode left a great impression upon our aged relative, and——"

"Well?"

"Well, he offered me a home with him, and a good many other advantages, and——"

"Yes—well, what is the end?" asked Dot breathlessly.

"It was for all the world like a fairy story," mused Betty. "There was the white-haired grandfather, wealthy and irascible; there was the grey-bearded, lynx-eyed, eagle-nosed lawyer; and there was the young girl, shabbily dressed and poor, and"—she looked at Dot half-pleadingly—"and, of course, proud."

"But what was the end?" asked impatient Dot.

"Of course, I refused him," said Betty, and her face flushed and her eyes burned. "*Do* you imagine I'm going to be *adopted*! He tossed aside our mother for over twenty years! He never softened even when she was dying! Do you suppose *I* would live with him—be *adopted* by him—fed by him—clothed by him!"

"But," said Dot, "there is the money!"

"Much good may it do him," said Betty, with the scorn of the young. "He would want me to give up all of you for *it*—father—all of you!"

"When you refused?" asked Dot, who could not but feel sorry.

"He simply banged out of the office," said Betty, "and the poor relation gathered all the little pieces of herself together, told the lawyer that she despised dirty lucre and old men, and went away into the town alone."

"But—John Brown?"

"Ah, he has had a quarrel and gone away," said Betty.

A silence fell in. Betty could *feel* some of Dot's thoughts, and they kept the indignant blood burning in her face.

"I *couldn't* be adopted," she said, "even for the good of the family."

"It seems a pity—to have acted so hastily," said Dot. Then she saw Betty's eyes, and quickly became most anxious to avert a storm.

"What a very pleasant room," she said; "I like the window at each end. And *how* pretty your floor is!"

"It wants sweeping," said Betty gruffly, but a trifle mollified.

Dot's quick eyes flashed round. In truth, the room was much improved.

Quite a handsome bookcase, about six feet high, and four wide, in blackwood, and without offending glass doors, stood across the room, from one wall almost to the beginning of the back window. And several books graced its shelves.

Behind it were Betty's kerosene cases, representing cupboards, a row of pegs for her dresses, a couple of hat boxes.

A green serge curtain hung round the legs of the writing-table; a bamboo table, heaped with magazines, stood beside it.

The canary twittered in the window, and upon the wall were prints of men great in the great world—Goethe, Kingsley, Spencer—men Dot had hardly heard of.

"Is that the bookcase?" asked Dot interestedly. All the anger faded from Betty's eyes, and enthusiasm came there instead.

"Isn't it a beauty!" she said. "Only two guineas. Of course, it was second hand. I'd had my eye on it for long enough, and then, all at once I got two pounds, ten shillings for a story, and I *had* to let myself go—I simply had to have it."

"You had to work for your money," said Dot kindly. "I think you were quite justified in spending it as you liked."

Very much of that elder sisterly, superior manner seemed to be leaving Dot of late.

Betty did not discriminate, indeed, she hardly realised the subtle change, and she certainly did not dream that it had to do with Dot striving after the "ideal."

But she herself felt rarely so "rubbed up the wrong way," as she put it; she was not in a second and for slight cause transformed into a firebrand. Except to-day! And already she was a little ashamed of herself.

"There is more to come yet," she said, looking at Dot.

"More bookcases?" laughed Dot.

"No. More about me. Guess—you couldn't!

Yesterday morning I got a check for ten guineas from London!"

"What!" cried Dot, and she looked more amazed than over the story of Captain Carew.

Betty repeated her statement.

"It was for five legends—Australian legends," she said. "I wrote them and posted them before I left home."

"Was that the letter I forwarded to you on Tuesday?" asked Dot.

"That was it. Oh, it was a *lovely* surprise, for truly I'd forgotten I'd written them."

She went to her writing table, fumbled under the serge curtain, and came back with five sovereigns and five shillings in her hand, and dropped them in a glittering heap on Dot's knee.

"For the home and the babies," she said.

"Don't be so foolish!" said Dot half angrily.

"I was going to bring it to you on Sunday," said Betty.

"Well, I'm not going to take it," said Dot. "It would be madness. It's only the other day that you sent home that beautiful easy chair for father's study, and before that there

was Joan's new dress and Dick's and Pepper's coats."

Betty's eyes were glistening.

"Always I meant it to be," she said. "A certain percentage of every story for the home.

"You can refuse to take it, Dot, but I shall simply buy something and send it. And I thought you would know best what was wanted. A carpet square for the dining-room?"

"How about one for *this* room?" said Dot, looking at the painted floor.

"Unhealthy," said Betty. "I sleep here. Carpets in a bedroom are unhealthy."

"Well," said Dot, "you want more clothes. You do, truly, Betty. That hat, dear old girl, it is so old fashioned."

"Oh, bother hats!" said Betty airily.

"You can't!" said Dot. "Look here, Betty, you're shabby, downright shabby. I'm almost afraid to tell you so, but——"

"I'm not ashamed," said Betty proudly. "If people value me for my clothes, well, the sooner——"

"That's rubbish," said Dot the wiseacre. "People in a great measure take us at our own valuation. I don't say go in for silks and

satins and feathers, but I *do* say you want a new hat and dress."

"How much can I do it on?" asked Betty.

"Five pounds," said Dot.

"Then I'll go in rags," said Betty firmly.

"Look, I've reserved five guineas of that check for myself—books, a sweet little low chair, and a picture. Do you think I'm going to fritter it away on clothes?"

"Will you spend two guineas?" asked Dot.

"Couldn't I do it on one?"

"Couldn't!"

"Then I'll go to thirty shillings, and not a penny more," said Betty, "a ready made skirt and a blouse and a hat."

"Thirty-five," pleaded Dot.

"Thirty," said Betty.

"Where were you going to when we came?"

"The library."

"I'll take the money for the home," said Dot reluctantly, "on one condition only—that you come out with me now and get your things."

"Very well," said Betty, laughing, "and we'll lunch together on strawberries and cream afterwards!"

"Oh!" breathed Nancy rapturously—"really and truly, Betty? Really and truly?"

CHAPTER XXVI

TROUBLES

BETTY tore up a thickly-written sheet of manuscript and flung the pieces around her on the floor.

There were many other such shattered pages on the painted floor.

"He *won't* live!" she said. "He's a puppet, a graven image—a doll!"

She sprang from her seat and began pacing up and down her floor.

"They're all growing more and more of puppets each day!" she groaned.

A twelvemonth had passed over her head.

She had written just fifty-two letters for the *Sydney Times*—some brilliant, some good, many bad.

She had composed and despatched to London, fully four months ago now, a book.

She had published many "skits" in the various colonial magazines and papers; she had contributed to her father's magazine several articles and stories *gratis*, and she had written

and sent out into the world of Australia, England, and America a score of short stories.

Now she was at work upon her second book, and was miserable because she could get into her characters no life-blood.

She had been burning midnight oil (or gas) in a reckless way, and her manner of living was absolutely regardless of health.

Mrs. Thornton at work in her basement often shook her head over the girl in the attic. She was not a mother, and could not remember her own.

No one had ever looked after her in her life, and she told herself she was none the worse for it. But she was uneasy over Betty, just vaguely uneasy, in spite of her abrupt manner. The girl was growing so thin, so large-eyed, and she seemed to be shutting herself up to herself more and more.

To-day Mrs. Thornton mounted to the attic and knocked at the door, and receiving no reply she turned the handle.

There was Betty, walking up and down, up and down, fever in her cheeks and eyes.

"Will you come and lunch with me?" asked Mrs. Thornton, and her eyes took in the fragments of paper on the floor.

"I've lunched, thank you," said Betty.

"You have *not!* It's only eleven o'clock."

"Oh, it was breakfast then," said the girl wearily.

"You'll come?"

"No, thank you," said Betty, "not to-day. It's one of the days when I should wear a cap to warn you off looking at me."

"You can spare an hour," said Mrs. Thornton.

Betty pointed to her floor wildly.

"Can I?" she said. "Look there, I can't spare five minutes!"

She flung herself before her writing table again and picked up her pen.

Mrs. Thornton, seeing her troubled condition, discreetly withdrew.

Half an hour later she met her on the staircase. There was still fever in her eyes and cheeks, and her mouth looked tremulous. She wore a thrice worn blouse, and a serviceable serge skirt.

"I'm going out for a bit," she said. "That attic's too quiet. I want the noise of the streets."

And she went on downstairs.

The streets soothed her a little. She watched the men and women there, and for-

got, in a measure, those troublous anæmic ones on paper in her attic.

Then her feet took her mechanically to the *Sydney Times* office.

She went upstairs slowly, feeling tired. Near the door of her room she ran into Mr. Ferguson, and his face brightened at the sight of her.

"Oh, Miss Bruce," he said, "could you tell me whether—what's the word?—accordion pleats are worn now for evening dresses, or——"

"I don't know," said Betty; "I've not seen a ball dress for six months."

His face fell and he went away, for he had seen Betty in just such a mood before.

In the earlier days of her connection with the office, the girl had often been bewildered by the grave young man.

He would watch his opportunity, and then approach her with a question.

Would she tell him whether it was fashionable now to carve poultry on the table or off?

Did she know the very latest style for dressing hair?

Had she ever heard a rhyme about "A woman, a dog and a walnut tree"?

Generally Betty's replies gave satisfaction, though they left her wondering.

But after a while, she discovered the weekly Correspondence Column fell to his lot, and that his rôle in life seemed to be to ask questions.

To-day he had hardly left her before he was back again.

"Mr. Fulton wants to see you before you go," he said.

Mr. Fulton was Betty's editor.

"Is he alone now?" asked Betty.

"Yes—quite."

"Then I'll come."

She went briskly to the Editorial room, and untremblingly knocked at the door.

Twelve months of life in frequent touch with the room and its occupant had taken away her fears.

"Come in," said the editor. He looked at Betty. "I suppose you were coming to see me to-day?" he said.

"No," said Betty; "I only came to get my papers."

"You got my note?"

"No," said Betty.

"I wrote to you two days ago, and asked you to look in."

"I remember now," said Betty, crimsoning; "so you did. It—it slipped my memory."

The girl was too distraught to notice the editor's evident nervousness.

She just waited and he shuffled with his pen and papers.

"Look here, Miss Bruce," he said at last; "you know what I want you for, don't you?"

Betty looked at him surprised.

"I didn't know you wanted me," she said.

"I do. The fact is, I'm commissioned with a very unpleasant business. If I were anything but an ass, I'd lead up to it tactfully, and leave you understanding me from innuendoes. I never could do that sort of thing."

He shuffled again.

"The firm," he said—"the firm have commissioned me to, in the polite words of the commercial world, give you your sack!"

"Oh!" said Betty. Every bit of color left her face.

"Do sit down," said the editor, and he reached her a second chair. She did not see it.

"Why?" she asked.

He hesitated—then looked at her frankly.

"Your work has been very bad—for a long time," he said.

"*Has* it?" asked the girl, amazed; "are you sure?"

"Bad! You've been unpunctual, wrong in many of your facts, and most unpardonable of all, of late, uninteresting."

"I didn't know," said Betty, and her lips quivered, while her face still stayed white.

The editor began to walk up and down his room quite agitatedly.

"Look here," he said, "you're not cut out for this sort of work. Go hard at what you're made for. Your stories are good. It's grind of routine you can't manage. I sympathize with you, for I'm the same myself."

"Soothe me by telling me I'm a genius!" said Betty with a sudden laugh, although she could not but appreciate his genuine kindness; "and unfit for the routine of life."

"That's the way!" he said relievedly, "laugh! I'm convinced you'll get on far better without our letter. Mrs. Evans, our new lady——"

"So I'm superseded already?" asked Betty. He nodded.

"I've been warning you for months now," he said.

"I never noticed," said Betty. "Looking back, I'm afraid I've been in another world

lately. And the occupants of that have just put me out too. Romance is ridiculous."

"You want a rest," said the editor kindly.

The girl drew herself up and smiled.

"I believe it's the best thing that could have happened to me," she said. "Am I to do next week's letter or not?"

"Do it," said the editor; "that will end your month. Now sit down."

She sat down for a little while and began to talk blithely, though feeling numbed.

Betty had never been ashamed of her shabbiest gown, of her surroundings, of her poverty. Her nature was too simple and too proud.

But she would have been bitterly ashamed of herself had she shown her hurt now.

The color came back to her cheeks and the light to her eyes, and when she left the editor it was with a laugh and a handshake—and her head held proudly.

She sought out Mr. Ferguson.

"I never liked accordion pleats," she said, "so I've not noticed them much; but I'll find out and let you know by post to-morrow."

He was duly grateful.

She went downstairs and walked home smilelessly and with a weight at her heart.

And she toiled up the five flights of stairs like one careworn and no longer young.

"I've to face this out," she said, as she shut and locked her door. "It isn't just the money—though that's terrible—it's the shame! I've been drawing good money and giving bad work!"

For a long while she was too miserable to face it out. But when at last she did it meant counting up the money remaining and looking up any coming in.

In the bag she kept under her table she found she had four pounds, seventeen shillings and sixpence halfpenny in cash, and in a match box in the bag was ten shillings in two-shilling pieces—the result of five weeks' savings. That money was for the home and no thought of keeping it to help her over yawning rough places occurred to her.

Then she found a Melbourne paper held a story of hers accepted, but it was an open question when it would be published and paid for.

"And I can't write," said the girl despairingly. "I'm written out! Done with. I've often heard of such cases."

Then she tossed back her head.

"I'm *not*!" she said. "I suppose I'm what

is called 'run down.' Now I come to think of it, I've been running down for a good while—I've felt so funny. I'll go home for the day to-morrow and do nothing but play with the babies in the garden."

And she flung herself on her trundle bed and fell asleep.

* * * * *

So Betty went home the next day.

It was Sunday, and she had to be away early to catch the last tram that ran before church.

Tired out and pale, the girl got into the tram and travelled higher and higher from the harbor shores to the Heights.

It was an oppressive summer morning; no smallest breath came to refresh the perspiring wayfarer, and the further one went from the water the worse the trouble grew.

Last night Betty had worked late to make up for that day sleep of hers, but her work had been bad, and she had torn it all up again in a storm of tears.

As she passed her grandfather's gates this morning, she wondered if it was possible that he had offered to adopt her to set her above the monetary cares of the world!

And then came a sudden rising of her

spirits, *because* she had refused, an exhilarating sense of self-respect.

The bush track had grown wider, more arid looking. So many feet trod it now, so few in the sweet long ago, before civilization crept to this out-of-the-way corner of the world.

Most of the saplings had disappeared—many of the older stalwart trees.

Four modern cottages faced the main road, and showed cosy, red-tiled roofs, and turned black roofs of corrugated iron to the “track.”

Betty came to her home wicket gate.

There was nothing modern here. The garden was old, deliciously old, the fencing was old—in parts, decrepitly so.

From the gate one could not see the cottage because of the luxuriant garden growth.

Betty walked through the sweet scents along the shady paths, and peace came to her troubled spirit. Red and white roses embowered the veranda just as thickly as red and white roses could embower. The rough fencing that shut off the path to the yard gate was literally smothered with sweet peas and honeysuckle, and in the garden borders were lad's love and wall-flower, phlox and mignonette.

Betty sniffed and sniffed. How beautiful

something was! Her attic had given her nothing like this. She went up the veranda steps and behind the roses. The hall door stood open, the hall looked neat—quietness reigned. She went down the hall—peeped into the dining-room. Marvel—the dinner-table was set—white cloth, so clean—fresh flowers—serviettes folded into fan shapes and placed in glistening tumblers—shining silver. She peeped into her father's study—into the bedrooms one after another. All neat, clean, deserted. She went to the kitchen. A fire burned there with two saucepans upon it. The table was snow-white; and in orderly array upon it were a pair of vegetable dishes, a stack of meat plates, a white bowl and wooden spoon. But no Mary was visible.

Chastened by the sight of such housewifery, and wondering very much, Betty stepped out of doors again. She fancied she heard voices around on the shady part of the house where the tall old pine tree stood; so she went there, and under the pine tree was Mary in black dress and white apron, leaning back comfortably in a deck chair; Pepper and Dick were playing with pine cones, stacked on a little table built around the tree. And the hammock had left its apple tree, after all these

years of residence, and swung there tightly from two substantial-looking poles driven into the ground.

Pepper ran to Mary.

"Leenlocer," he cried, and stood in what he believed to be a mannish attitude before her.

"Six pounds of grapes," said Mary, "and two dozen peaches."

"All li," said Pepper.

Dick ran to her.

"Greengrocer!" he said.

"What have you got?" asked Mary.

"Welly good vegetables," said Dick—"cal-lots and peas and 'nanas and mandalins and——"

Betty laughed and ran to them, catching both little boys in her arms at once.

"Good lor', Miss Betty!" said Mary.

"Oh, Betty—I'm a Chinaman; do come and see my shop. Do Chinamen have shops, Betty?" asked Dick.

"Dear Betty!" said Pepper, and clung to her neck.

Mary vacated her chair and placed it at Betty's disposal.

"The others 'ave all gone to church!" said Mary. "Miss Dot takes 'em every Sunday."

Dick pointed a finger at Mary.

"Peas!" he said.

"Oh lor'! I nearly forgot," said Mary and disappeared kitchenwards.

"I have to keep saying 'peas' to her every five minutes Dot says, then she can't forget," said Dick, explaining to Betty. "That's my work for Sunday."

Betty sat down in the canvas chair under the pine tree, and she took off her hat and gloves and threw them on the ground and leaned back and half shut her eyes. She gave vegetable orders to the small boys, and in a far off sense heard their chatter. And a tiny breeze crept up and grew bolder and bolder, and stirred the dark hair on her forehead, and wafted the hammock backwards and forwards, and scattered pine needles on the dark ground.

And the beauty of the summer Sunday morning under the pine tree was such that it needed nothing to be added to it—and nothing to be taken away—which is very rare in this world.

Then the party came home from church, Nancy and Joan in short white frocks and large shady hats, Dot looking for all the world like a sea-nymph in a gown of *eau-de-*

nil muslin and a droopy black hat; Cyril, well brushed, handsome and spruce.

"Betty!" they all exclaimed one after the other.

Betty sat up and blinked.

"Could anyone tell me if this is the Bruce family?" she asked, waving her hand around. "I'm lost and I want to be found."

"We've only been to church," said Dot, laughing.

"*We* never could get dressed in time," said Betty. "And father, where is he? Is he church warden and staying behind to mind the plates?"

"Come inside," said Dot, "or rather, no, stay out till dinner. Father? I don't know. He's troublesome to manage. I fancy he hides on a Sunday morning; anyway, he disappears."

But Mr. Bruce was in his place at dinner, though when questioned as to where he had been was merely vague.

He said he had been to sleep—had been scribbling—had been looking at the fruit trees and at the dam in the back paddock. And Betty laughed.

But the orderliness of that dinner table kept her mute at frequent intervals. Mr. Bruce

sat at the head of the table and carved, Dot at the foot and dispensed vegetables. Cyril supplied the family with drinks. Dick and Nancy and Betty sat at one side of the table, and Pepper and Cyril and Joan at the other.

And the feast consisted of cold lamb and mint sauce, peas, and potatoes, a pudding—new to Betty—of the blanc mange order, and called by Dot “Angel’s Food,” and cold stewed peaches.

After dinner, chairs were carried out under the pine tree, and Mr. Bruce and Betty went there, while Dot, in a clean apron, bustled about for half an hour with Mary.

“What an excellent manager Dot is,” said Betty to her father.

“We are very comfortable,” he said. “I didn’t think the child had it in her. One of her ancestors must have belonged to that poetic order of womanhood and spun her own linen, and made her own preserves, and put sweet lavender and rosemary among the sheets.”

“But never a drop of her blood was reserved for me,” said Betty, and sat still, considering sadly. It seemed to her that both as a housekeeper and writer she had failed conspicuously.

“What hand and brain went ever paired,
What heart alike conceived—and dared—
What act proved all its thought had been,”

she mused half aloud.

“Eh?” said her father.

“It seems to me,” said Betty, “that I’ve had the thoughts and inspirations; I foresaw how the house could be made homelike. I had beautiful plans—model lists. And I tried, but ‘the fleshy screen’—that must have been it. And with my Pegasus, I was going to ride and ‘see fairer cities, worlds anew.’ And here I am, back to the old earth again, not a bit the better for my voyaging.”

“Why, all men strive—and who succeeds,” quoted her father, who lay on his back on the ground, staring up into the tree. “There’s a pleasure in the striving after all—must be, or we’d give it up.”

“How is the magazine?” asked Betty, rousing herself.

“We’ve had a bad month,” said Mr. Bruce dismally. “Last month was very bad indeed; the canvassers only half-filled the covers and the subscribers fell off.”

“Look here,” said Betty, sitting upright and looking bright, “why not try this: a series of

picture puzzles, historical or geographical, or both—two or three good prizes at stake.”

“Um,” said her father reflectively. “Good prizes are expensive attractions.”

“Why not,” said Betty, “try a rich firm; offer them advertisements in return, and the giving of a prize would be a good advertisement for them.”

Her father raised himself and looked at her expectantly. He always expected bright ideas from his second daughter, even though he derived comfort from his eldest.

Dot came towards them, apron removed, garden hat on.

“I’ll think it out,” said Betty. “You would have to try your hand at the puzzles—say, a great, great boulder on a sea beach, a ham and a ton weight. That is easy—Rockhampton. Make them stiff, say, for historical, now—Disraeli, Bismarck, or——”

“Oh, no business talk,” pleaded Dot. “I never allow it on a Sunday, do I, father? All cobwebs have to be brushed away on Saturday night.”

“What firm would you suggest?” asked Mr. Bruce of Betty.

Dot held up her finger. “Now, daddie!” she said, “you belong to the family, and so

does Betty. Put you two together, and we might all go over the mountains of the moon, for all you'd know—or care."

"Could you come to my office in the morning?" asked Mr. Bruce of Betty hurriedly. "It—it might be the saving of the magazine."

Betty nodded. "Between ten and eleven," she said.

Her father sank back again on the needle-strewn earth, and went on dreaming and planning, and Dot and Betty drew chairs together and began to talk, Joan and Dick and Pepper playing around them.

"Every time I come home I see greater improvements," said Betty. "You're like Shelley's Skylark, mounting higher still and higher——"

"Oh!" said Dot, and a bright smile came to her face.

"Truly," said Betty. "The home is not the same; some way you've got sweet peace and order into it. I never did it—never could have done it."

"But you've helped," said Dot, and her eyes shone at the praise. "I was counting up yesterday. You've given this last year £20 to the house. That's why the table looked so nice—new table linen, tumblers, even the dinner-

service you gave. Those curtains at the window, father's chair."

A wave of gladness went into Betty's heart. She had done something after all, it seemed.

"Oh," said Dot, sighing, "it was hard work at first. I nearly gave up a hundred times—even now, after a year, things are often difficult. Some times I fancy I don't mind Cyril enough—or father. Cyril won't tell me things; he is often late home at night, and ——"

"But he takes you to church. He wouldn't take me," said Betty.

"Ah!" said Dot, "he likes going out. There are a few people about here now. Sometimes we go to euchre evenings and musicals and tennis, and he likes having a sister to take out. And he has a new suit, and——"

"Oh," laughed Betty, "I understand."

At about three o'clock there came round the corner of the house to them Dr. Mark Parbury—to Betty's disgust.

"Oh, bother!" she whispered to Dot. "I wish we'd put a notice upon the gate."

But the doctor was genial and seemed much at home. Mr. Bruce sank from a day dream into a day sleep; Cyril sauntered out, looking

as if he had been slumbering, and he took the chair Dot had vacated next to Betty; and Joan sat on the doctor's knee, and Nancy hovered near Dot, and the baby, toddling now, played with the little boys.

Betty's eyes lingered wonderingly on Nancy's face. Such a change seemed to have come there. Its peevish, discontented look had gone; her lips were red, her cheeks like peach blossom.

"The year from school seems to have done wonders for Nancy," she said.

"And the cod liver oil," laughed the doctor. "Dot has to hide the bottle from her, she tells me, now."

"I do," laughed Dot, "or there's never any for next day."

"But I do work," said Nancy proudly. "I don't just drink oil and stay at home!"

"She's a great help to me," said Dot; "she sets the table and minds baby and dusts the rooms."

"She never did a thing for me," said Betty.

"But Dot is so pretty," said Nancy, "and she doesn't get inky."

Every one laughed.

"How goes office, Cyril?" asked Betty.

"Oh, there's another fellow there now," said

Cyril, "and he minds the telephone, and I get out a bit more. It makes a lot of difference, I can tell you!"

The afternoon tea came out, beautifully set, and Betty watched Dot officiating and Nancy hovering near to help, and the doctor handing cups and saucers and cake around. And as she looked, a great light came to Betty. It was as if she had been writing or reading a story, and had suddenly stumbled upon the most beautiful chapter of the book. Dot's face and the doctor's! Betty watched both, and stirred her tea and watched, and grew very silent. She could understand now why Dot the Rosebud was opening into such a sweet, fair rose; for was not Love's sun as well as Duty's shining upon her?

And the doctor—well, even one with not half Betty's romantic nature could have understood the doctor.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE LETTER FROM LONDON

BUT Betty's visit home laid her spirit low. It impressed her so with a sense of her failures.

She returned to her attic that Sunday evening and had a dull two hours of lonely unhappiness. And she told the stars from her window that she did not know what she had been made for, and that she had rather never, never have been born, never have tried to soar, than have failed.

And the stars spoke back to her, as they have a way of doing to highly strung, artistic natures who speak to them. They gave her the silent sympathy that kind eyes so often give without any words, so that she let her own words go, and talked to them in those of wise dead men who had soared above them. And of course—

“ Oh star of strength, I see thee stand
And smile upon my pain ;

Thou beckonest with thy mailed hand
And I am strong again."

And she left the window.

"I will begin again," she said humbly. "I've had a fall and it hurt me; I've cried. Now I've put away my handkerchief—and no more of falls—till the next time. I'll go to bed now while I am at peace with myself, and I'll start a clean page to-morrow morning."

So she went to bed—it was long after twelve. Peace spread her white wings over her and she slept, and did not wake until nine o'clock the next morning. And after she had bathed and dressed and breakfasted, she saw, lying on the fourth step to her attic, a letter and a thick, blue envelope.

Every one knows the nice, smooth, *good* feeling that a cold bath and a Turkish towel, a mighty resolution and a new spirit give.

Betty picked up her letter and smiled bravely.

"Bad news," she said; "but I'm ready. It's a bomb from London, but it shan't reach my heart. I won't be cast down."

She reached her attic.

"Is it my book?" she asked of the white envelope, "or my legends? I think I won't

open either of you till I've been to father's office."

But, of course, she did. She opened the white letter first and read:

"DEAR MADAM,—We are in receipt of your MS, and are prepared to accept it if you agree to our terms. We would pay you £50 as copyright for the book, retaining all rights, serial and otherwise.

"Should you decide to agree to our terms, we enclose a memorandum of agreement under separate cover. Will you sign that and return it by next mail, and we will at once forward you a check for £50.

"Should you not care for our terms, will you forward us instructions as to what we shall do with manuscript, etc.

"Yours faithfully,

"ANDREW & BLAIN.

"Per J. C."

Betty gasped, read it through again, then threw it from her and flung herself face downwards on the floor.

"It's a refusal," she said, "I know it is! Of course it is. Only I'm delirious and can't read aright!" She sobbed on—"I've felt de-

lirious for a good many days now. Perhaps I'm in bed and there's a nurse beside me. Is there?" She sat up and gazed around her.

"It looks like my attic—that looks like a letter—and that like a blue envelope." She snatched up her letters and ran downstairs.

"Why—why—why, *whatever* is the matter," asked Mrs. Thornton in amazement, as she burst into the kitchen.

"Am I delirious?" demanded Betty. "Read that and tell me about it."

Mrs. Thornton read slowly, very slowly, but her face grew brighter and brighter, and at last she looked into the girl's wet, wild eyes and said,

"Well, I *do* congratulate you. £50! It is like the beginning of a career."

"I'm accepted?" asked Betty anxiously.

"Very much so, if you will permit it," said Mrs. Thornton.

The girl whirled upstairs again, put on her hat and snatched up her gloves, ran down again, and picked up her letters from the kitchen table.

"There's only one person in the world could understand," she said. "I must go to father."

And she went away down the stairs and out into the street.

She was back again at four o'clock and went straight down to the basement.

"Are you there, Mrs. Thornton?" she called from the lowest step.

Mrs. Thornton came out of the basement, looking lugubrious.

"I've—I've knocked my woman's nose off," she said.

"Oh dear," said Betty sympathetically, "and it *was* such a beautiful nose!"

She went into the basement, in which the gas burned brightly; wood in piles was stacked everywhere; there was a carpenter's bench with tools of every description; paints, etc., etc. Mrs. Thornton bent over a dark, wooden panel, upon which, in hollywood, was the carving of a nymph with a garland of roses on her head.

"I was fiddling," said Mrs. Thornton; "I should have let her alone."

"I told you it was perfect," said Betty.

"It was just the tip I didn't like."

"What can you do?"

Mrs. Thornton looked up. There was a certain hollowness in the girl's voice; her face was quite white, her eyes large, dark, fierce.

"You've had no lunch," said Mrs. Thornton.

"I forgot," said Betty.

"What did your father say?"

"Oh, he was glad—quite out of proportion."

"Could he be?" asked Mrs. Thornton, and she could not but watch the girl, half fascinated by her pallor, and excessive sadness.

"My next book will be refused," said Betty, "and everything else I do. I've signed and posted the agreement, but now—oh, Mrs. Thornton, open the window, do."

She seized a projecting piece of wood on the bench, reeled, and fell, dragging half a score of tools and a few pieces of wood with her. Mrs. Thornton promptly ran into the next cellar, where she did her washing, and fetched a dipper of cold water and splashed the girl's face. But Betty did not move, so she ran upstairs and asked the doorman to send down her husband's *locum tenens*. When he came it was with bag and hat in his hand, for he was just going home.

"I do not know what to do," said Mrs. Thornton distractedly. "You have met Miss Bruce—you know her. She has just fallen down like this."

Dr. James promptly placed bag and hat

on a bench, and removed a saw from Betty's chest and a plane from her arm.

"Um," he said, "it's—it's—collapse; I've seen it coming for some time. We'll get her upstairs."

They improvised a stretcher from a long plank of wood, and they put the unconscious girl upon it, and then they procured the services of the dentist; and the doctor and the dentist between them carried their light burden from the basement to the attic—up five flights of stairs—which was a way poor, ambitious Betty had never dreamed of reaching her top-storey heaven. And they put her on her trundle bed, and administered restorative after restorative.

"High pressure, overwork," said the doctor. "I've not liked the look of her lately; I told her last week to take a holiday."

"I didn't know you saw her often," said Mrs. Thornton.

"On the stairs and landing, and occasionally in your room," said the young man. He pointed to Betty's white, clear cut face, to her thin, lifeless arms.

"She's half starved," he said.

Then Betty's dark eyes rolled open.

"Better now?" said the young man genially.

"It's posted," said Betty weariedly, "signed and posted."

"That's right. Now you can rest."

"I must get to work at once—at once."

"To-morrow will do."

"Oh, will it?" said Betty, and tried to rise, only to fall back again into semi-consciousness.

"She will want watching through the night," said the doctor. "I'll give her a draught. What about her people?"

"I will watch her," said Mrs. Thornton. "I would like to." Her eyes were full of tears, for this sudden illness of Betty's had been a shock to her.

Betty's fever ran high that night, and she was in very truth delirious. She held a passionate conversation with the editor who had dismissed her—she proposed geographical puzzles—and she cried over her failure.

The doctor came back again at eight o'clock.

"If we sent her home," he said to Mrs. Thornton, "could she be well nursed?"

Betty's eyes opened again. "I couldn't," she said; "there are too many of us. If I'm going to be ill—send me to a hospital."

"Tut, you're not going to be ill. The sort

of hospital you want is a convalescent home."

"I must just see my proof," said the girl. "Sharpe dismissed me—given me the sack—because I couldn't do accordion pleating." So she rambled on.

In the middle of the night her dark eyes met Mrs. Thornton's blue ones, and she inquired earnestly—

"If you like yon bird discovered,
Fate as close at hand—"

and Mrs. Thornton, shivering, arose and administered the second draught.

In less than half an hour Betty slept, slept like a tired, pale child, worn out with the strivings and tossings of fever; one thin hand, with an ink-stain on its middle finger, lay under a white cheek; black eyelashes lay over dark, tired eyes; tired lines around her pale lips smoothed themselves away.

And at nine in the morning she still slept, and the doctor and Mrs. Thornton looked at her.

"No more fit to look after herself than a baby," said the doctor. "In plain English, it's a case of starvation, overwork, and worry! And she's nineteen!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

COLLAPSE

BETTY'S illness was a sharp one. Mr. Bruce and Dot were summoned, and Dot called in Dr. Mark Parbury. And Dr. Mark had poor delirious Betty removed to his own private hospital in an ambulance, and there she received every attention that medical skill and good nursing could give.

At the hospital they also called her illness by the mysterious word, collapse.

"Complete breakdown, body and mind," said Dr. Mark. "If the foolish child had only given herself even proper food and exercise, this would never have happened. People of Betty's make are never fit to look after themselves."

While she was in the hospital there came another letter in a blue envelope to her—a letter with the stamp of a firm of Sydney solicitors upon it, and it was forwarded to her father to be opened, for Betty was not trusted with letters just then.

And this letter held such news that it upset Mr. Bruce, Dot, and all the family of Bruces, excepting only the babies.

In a fortnight Betty was pronounced convalescent, and she was sent home to Dot to be nursed. She lay on a lounge under the pine tree and had very few thoughts, very many sleeps, and "nourishment" at frequent intervals. On the third day she carried a pencil and some paper out with her and began to scribble—and grow pink-cheeked and dreamy-eyed by reason of the scribbling; on the fifth day she spoke boldly of returning to her attic.

"You never will go back there," said Dot gently, "never any more, Betty."

"Won't I?" said Betty with something of her old fire. "Do you expect I am going to give up because I've had a headache?"

"I've got something to tell you," said Dot, looking important.

"I *know*," said Betty.

"Oh, no, you don't; I've got to break it to you, and I don't know how. Betty, you're—you're rather important."

"Oh," said Betty. "Am I? Why?"

"You've had a bit of money left you," said Dot.

"My fifty pounds hasn't come," said Betty, and fire shone in her eyes.

"Oh, no. *That* is of very little consequence. You've had a *lot* of money left you."

"Oh," said Betty.

"Am I breaking it well? Oh, Betty, do take it quietly. Grandfather is dead; he died suddenly, and he has left his big house and nearly all his money to *you*."

"Oh," said Betty very quietly.

"You'll be very rich, Betty—very. Isn't it wonderful?"

Then Betty broke out.

"It's being adopted," she said. "I told him I wouldn't be—I told him I wouldn't. Do you know what I was going to do, Dot? I was going to make a big income with my pen—I was, I can tell you. You don't know the magnificent dreams I've had. I was going to be 'self-made.' I told him that a year ago."

"You might have been making £200 a year by the time you were sixty," said Dot sceptically. "To tell you the truth, I don't believe in your self-made woman."

"You're old fashioned," said Betty, with sarcasm. "I shall settle so much on all of

you—Cyril, father, all of you—and go on as I was going.”

“It’s no use being mad,” said Dot. “Father says you can’t touch the capital, and you don’t get a penny till you’re twenty-one.”

“Then I’ve nearly two years,” said Betty vigorously.

Betty was the only one who rejoiced in that the fortune was not for to-day’s gathering.

There was something indomitable about her, something of what the world always wants—true grit, as well as the fire of inspiration.

In six weeks from the time of her breakdown she was back in her attic again, blithely climbing her five flights of stairs.

And there came to her from over the water a check for £50, which she judiciously banked after sending to Dot, the housekeeper, £10.

“That’s this year’s income made for me,” she told herself. “I can go quietly on with my book and let detestable social letters alone.”

CHAPTER XXIX

JOHN BROWN

IT was the end of the year. Nine months had flown by since Betty's book was accepted, and her finances were running low. She had been so hard at work upon her new book, so deep in it, that she had neglected that very necessary method of the struggling author—the replenishing of the exchequer by means of “the pot boiler.”

And although one year hence she was to be very wealthy, to-day she had just opened her purse and discovered she had come out without the means for the shilling dinner she had meant to indulge in, to save herself cooking. One solitary sixpence reposed in the centre of her purse.

“I know I have a sovereign at home,” she soliloquised, “still, as it isn't here, I can only have a sixpenny lunch. Once in a way that can't matter.”

She sought out a tea shop in an arcade, and entering, was making her way to a small,

marble-top table when there rose between her and it a thin, awkward figure in a loose, grey suit.

"John!" said Betty in amazement.

"Betty!" said John, and he looked very glad. "Let us sit down. This is good."

"I understood," said Betty, settling herself, her two books, and parasol and magazines, "I understood you had deserted our world, for one where rich old men were not."

"I merely slipped out of a back door," said John, "into a back lane. One of these days I'll drive coach and six up the main street."

Betty looked at him attentively. He had always, even in the old, old days of young boyhood, been plain of face, but now the plainness was sharpened, accentuated. He looked as if he had suffered—was suffering still.

"I have heard about it," said Betty. "You've simply walked out of the Garden of Plenty—for us to walk in."

"Well," he said, "looking at the matter impartially, don't you think it was about time?"

"Oh, you needn't put it that way," Betty said hastily. "I know how often you tried to abdicate in our favor, and only gave in

when you saw plainly every penny would be left to a charity if you hadn't stayed on."

"Well," said John, "and why should I have prevented a charity benefiting? Are not the charities more worthy of support than one man?"

"Oh, that's all very well," said Betty. "Every one likes to hear of money being left to a charity—other people's money, not one's own. And, John"—she leaned a little across the table, her face flushed, her clear, girl's eyes sweetly earnest and kind, for, indeed, he looked so thin and wretched and lonely, something tugged at her heart to try to comfort him—"don't think that I don't recognize now, John—though I may not have done so when I was twelve—that it took a generous nature to accept grandfather's gifts. He offered them to you generously; you, finding they would never be offered to us, accepted them in the same spirit."

She paused breathless. He had been looking at the marble top of the table all the time she made her speech, her very long speech. She hoped she had made him understand—had swept his mind from the fear that she knew rankled there, the fear that they might think lightly of him for accepting the gifts.

He had not raised his eyes. His mouth twitched oddly.

Betty's generous young heart thumped.

Yes, yes, how bitterly she herself would feel it if she stood in his position!

Her impulsive hand went across to his to comfort him, as if he had been Cyril or Pepper.

But then John Brown's eyes flashed one look at her.

"You—mustn't do that, Betty," he said thickly. And he took his hand off the table. But the touch had fired his veins with the courage to meet and throw every enemy on the road to Fortune!

One look—and Betty was a woman. A lightning flash telegraphed across her new sky the meaning of expressions that had been in his eyes often in the last year or two of her own rule at the cottage. And in another flash of still shorter duration she saw the money shared—as, perhaps, the grandfather had foreseen it might be shared.

Then a burning flush swept up in her cheeks.

"Good-bye," she said indignantly. "I must go at once. I was forgetting an appointment—a most important appointment."

She gathered up her books and her parasol and her magazines.

There was her scone with only one bite taken out of it still lying on her plate. It was hateful to be a woman—she simply *wouldn't* be a woman.

“Good-bye,” she repeated, moving hurriedly from the table, not even shaking hands, “I don’t suppose we shall ever meet again.” It sounded very like, “I hope we shall never meet again.”

“Good-bye,” said John not attempting to detain her. “No, I suppose we shall not meet again—for some time.”

But he nearly knocked a couple of people over in the street, so fiercely eager was he to get back to his work.

Betty?

When she reached home she feverishly put on the shortest dress her wardrobe held and let her hair down her back, and tied it with a piece of pink ribbon.

It was her way of indignantly insisting to Fate that she refused to be a woman.

